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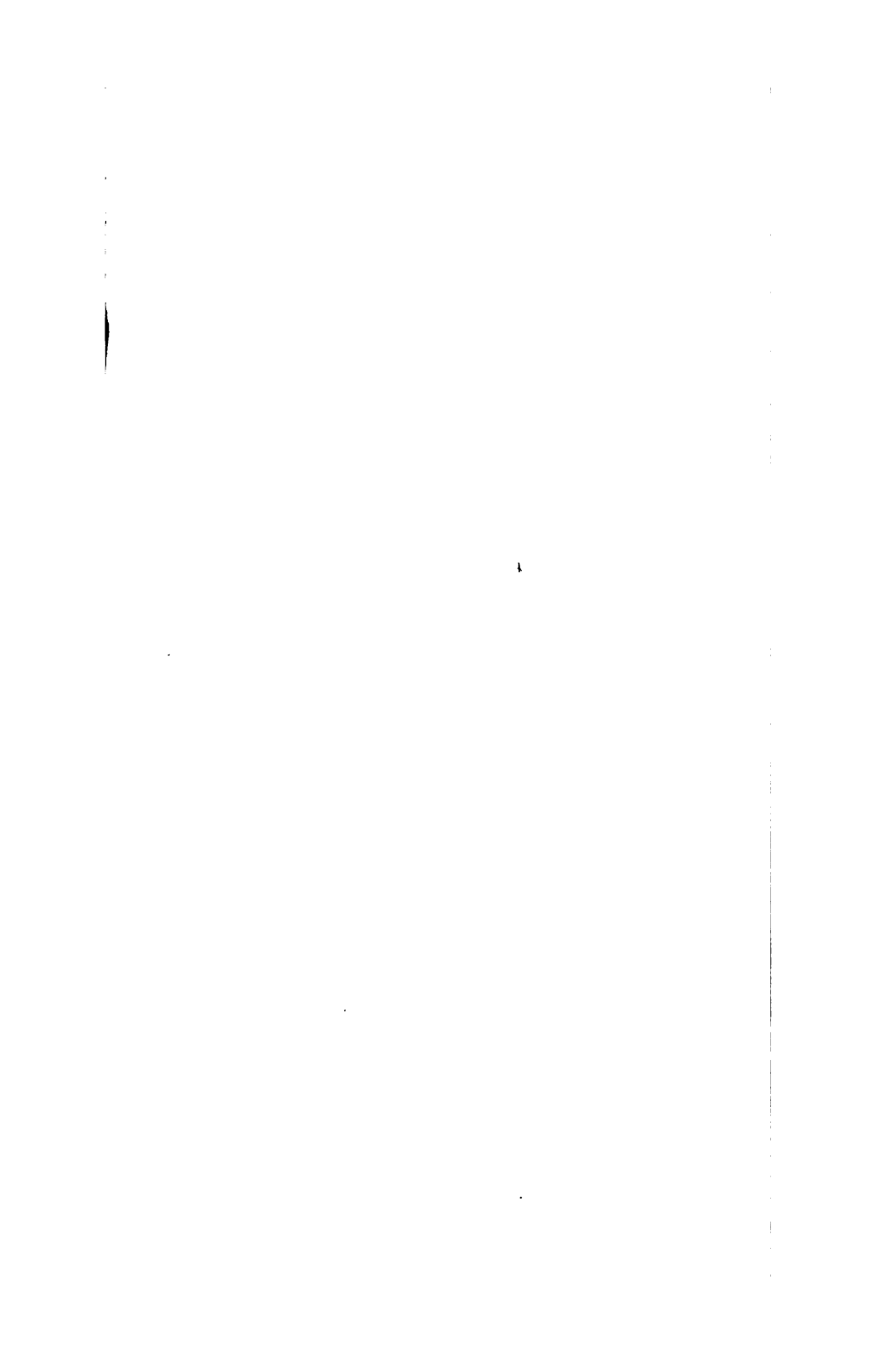
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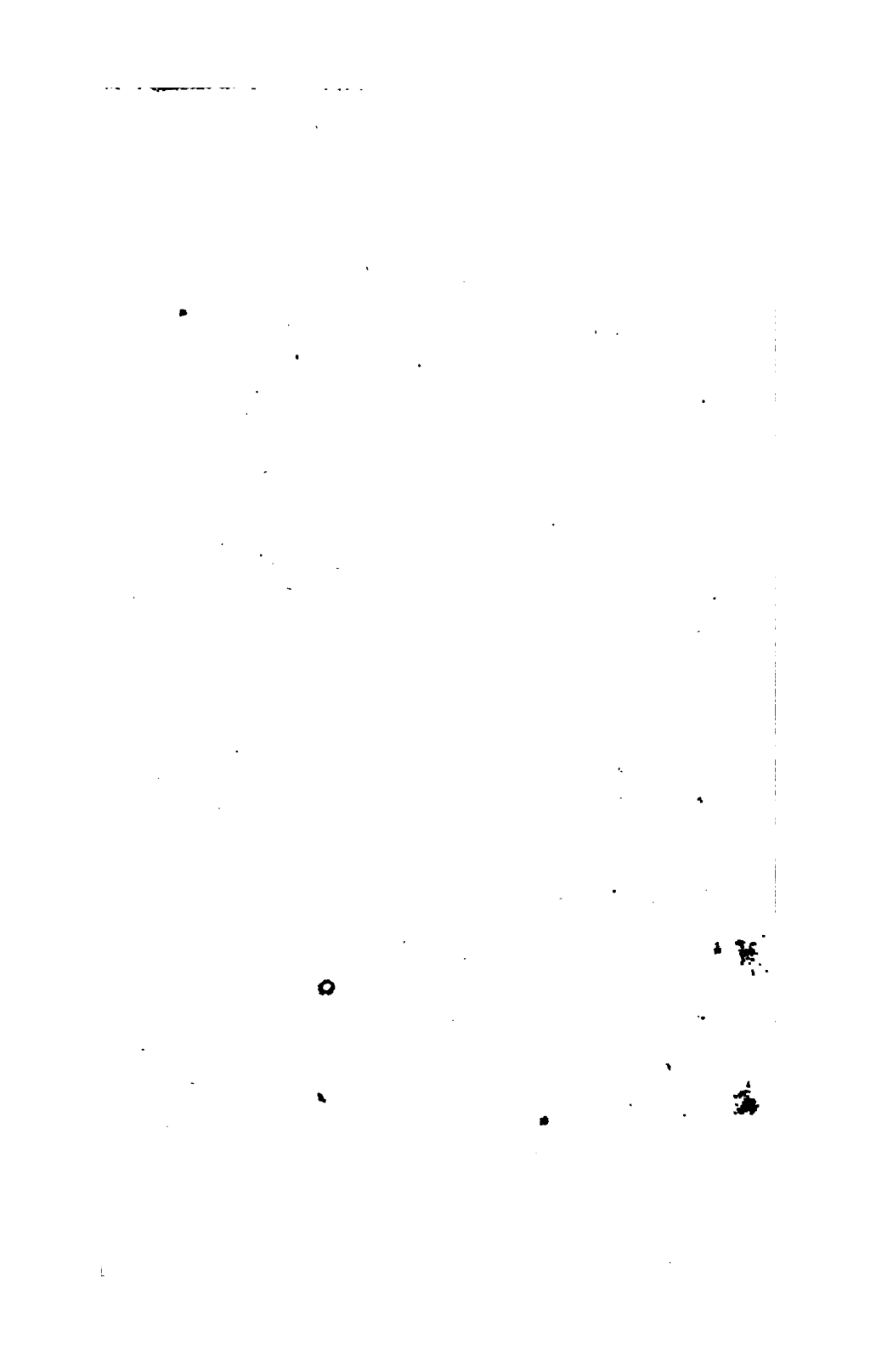


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"A serious gentleman as owns a factory."

L I F E
AND
A D V E N T U R E S
OF
MICHAEL ARMSTRONG,
THE FACTORY BOY.

BY FRANCES TROLLOPE,
AUTHOR OF "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE WIDOW
BARNABY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES
OF
MICHAEL ARMSTRONG,
THE FACTORY BOY.

CHAPTER I.

An unfortunate rencontre—An adventure—Miss Brotherton grows wiser every day.

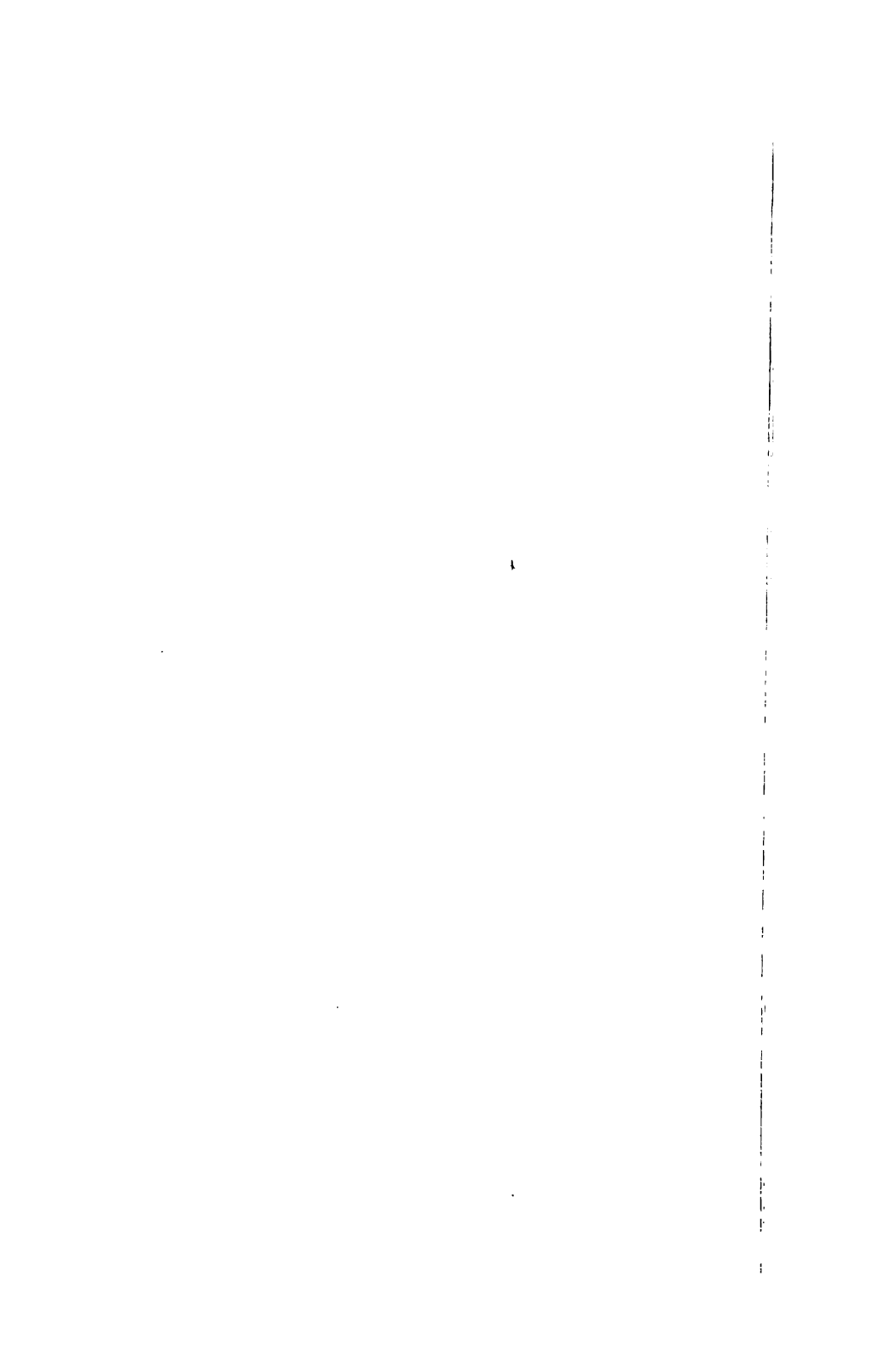
MRS. TREMLETT's inquiries proved successful. Jim Sykes, the weeding-boy, knew perfectly well where widow Armstrong lived ; and after he had repeated his instructions three times, Mary Brotherton and her unresisting chaperon set off on their expedition. On one point only did the self-willed heiress yield to the judgment of her companion. Mary, who knew that though she seldom went beyond the shelter of her own park paling, she often walked without

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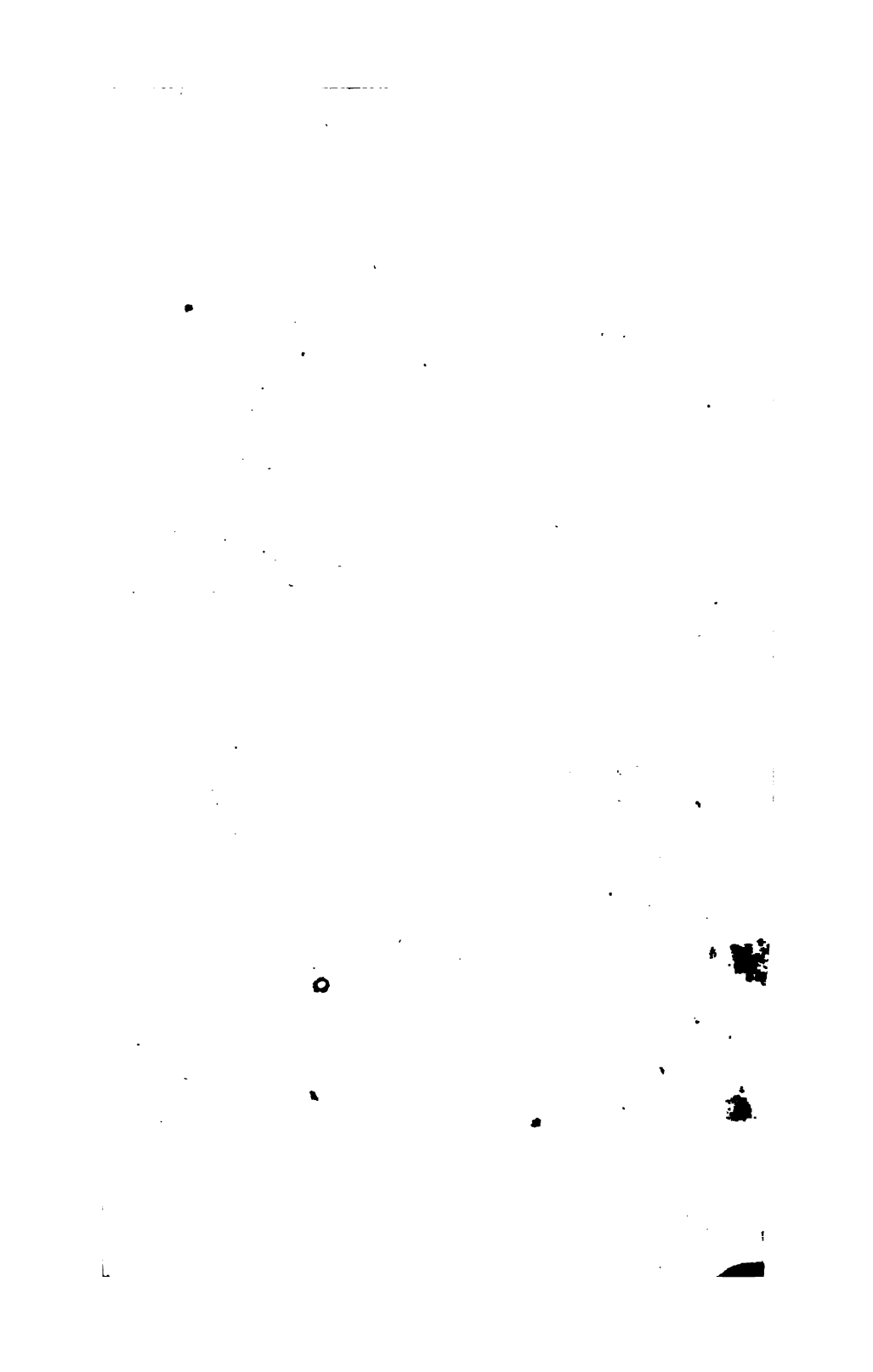


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of Onwryn delver

*"O Heaven! you are not going to
 these creatures. Miss Brotherton!"*

of Onwryn delver by Henry G. G. G.

Augustus threw himself from his horse at the same instant, and Mrs. Tremlett held herself suspended on the step of the carriage to learn what she was required to do.

"I wish to know what is the matter with these miserable-looking children," said Mary, approaching a half-open door, at each side of which, crouching on the stone step, sat a pale and squalid-looking girl. The eldest might be ten years old, the youngest was certainly not more than six.

"Gracious Heaven! you are not going to speak to those creatures, Miss Brotherton?" exclaimed Sir Matthew, while his son instinctively backed his horse into the middle of the street.

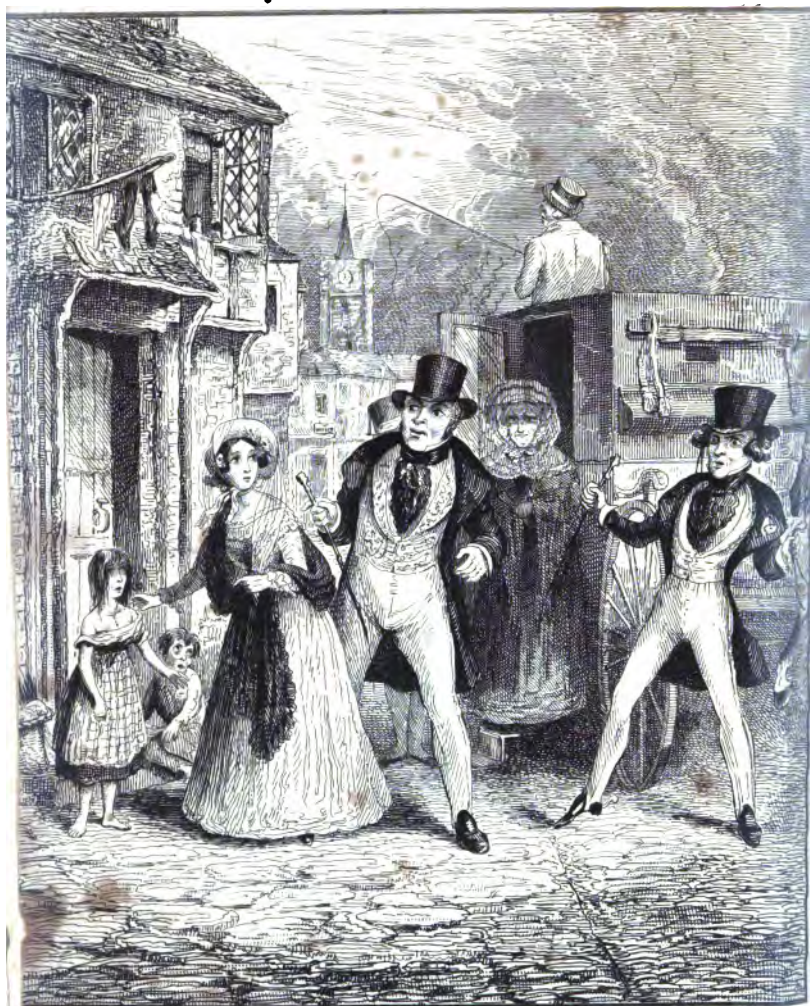
"And why not, Sir Mathew?" said Mary.

"You are not aware of what you are doing; I give you my honour you are not. You have no conception what these sort of creatures are. My dear, dear Miss Brotherton, get into your carriage—get into your carriage, I conjure you!"

Mary looked at him, but said not a word in reply.

"What ails you, my little girl?" said she, putting her hand upon the shoulder of the youngest child.

"Billy-roller," answered the little creature.



J. M. W. Turner del.

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"Billy-roller," answered the little creature.

"The billy-roller smashed her," said the eldest girl; "but 'twas falling asleep against the machinery as lamed me."

"Are you mad, Miss Brotherton!" exclaimed Sir Matthew. "Surely, Mrs. Tremlett, you ought to prevent your young lady from exposing herself to such scenes as these."

"Good morning, Sir Matthew; do not let me detain you," said the heiress, suddenly assuming the tone and style of a woman of fashion who chose to have her own way. "These sick little creatures quite interest me. Besides, I must positively find out who Billy Roller is."

"It is an instrument used in the works, Miss Brotherton. You know not to what you are exposing yourself—fraud, filth, infection, drunkenness! I give you my sacred honour that I think you are very likely to be robbed and murdered if you approach the thresholds of such dwellings as these."

"I beg your pardon, Sir Matthew," replied the heiress: "but you must excuse me if I obstinately persevere in judging for myself: I know I am a spoiled child, neither more nor less; and as such, you must either give me up or bear with me. Permit me to wish you good morning; I shall do more than approach the threshold of this dwelling—I shall enter it."

Having said this, she waited no further parley, but taking a ragged child in each hand set her little foot against the door which already stood ajar, pushed it open, and walked in.

Her first idea on looking round her was that perhaps Sir Matthew was in the right. Filth she saw; infection might lurk under it; and who could tell if fraud and drunkenness might not enter the moment after to complete the group?

But there was little of selfishness and much of courage in the heart of Mary Brotherton, so she presently forgot every notion of personal danger, and was thus enabled to see things as they really were.

On one side of the small bare chamber, and in some degree sheltered by the door which opened against it, stood a rickety machine once intended for a bedstead. Two of the legs had given place to brickbats, and instead of a bed the unsteady frame now supported only a thin layer of very dirty straw, with the body of a dying female stretched upon it. The only other article of furniture in the room was an old deal box without a cover, but having a couple of planks, each about three feet long, laid across it, serving either for table or

fatigue within it for two or three hours together, wished to set off for Hoxley-lane on foot; but Mrs. Tremlett talked so much of the fatigue, that the good-natured girl consented to let the carriage convey them to the point at which the lane diverged from the high-road. This yielding, however, was wholly from consideration for her companion. For herself she believed the precaution quite needless; and she was right. However much her temper might have been endangered by the series of spoiling processes she had undergone, her health had been taken good care of, and few girls of her age, in any rank, had greater power and will for exertion than herself.

Nevertheless, before she had driven half a mile, she heartily rejoiced at having sacrificed her own inclination to that of her good nurse; for the road to Ashleigh was the favourite ride of the officers quartered in the neighbourhood, and had she been seen on foot, it is probable that before reaching Hoxley-lane she would have been surrounded by a body-guard of military. So greatly did this danger appal her spirits, that the first moment she found herself free from a white-gloved hand, either at one window or the other, she stopped the carriage, and ordered the coachman to go far

enough down the lane to permit her to get out unobserved by any persons passing by the road.

But poor Mary was this day doomed to disappointment; and the indignant, and almost passionate beating of her heart under it made her more conscious, perhaps, than she had ever been before, how deeply the business upon which she was engaged had entered into her soul.

Soon after Sir Matthew Dowling had dismissed his breakfast companion, he strolled out towards his splendid stables, and perceiving his son loitering among the grooms, and himself equipped for the saddle, he inquired whither he was going to ride. "Only to Ashleigh, governor," was the reply.

"Then wait five minutes, Augustus, and I will ride with you."

Whether the youth approved the proposal or not, he was fain to submit to it, and the evil star of Mary Brotherton contrived to bring them to the top of Hoxley-lane at the moment her carriage was about to turn into it.

"Stop!" cried the young lady, accompanying the word with a very energetic pull at the check-string. "Go on to Ashleigh," was the order that followed.

chairs as occasion might require. The walls, the floor, the ceiling, and the remnant of a window, were all alike begrimed with smoke and dirt.

It took not long to make this inventory, and having completed it, the young lady, still holding in each hand a staring child, turned towards the inhabitant of this miserable den, and said,

“Are you ill, my good woman?”

The being she addressed raised her heavy eyes, and in a voice so low as to be scarcely intelligible answered “Yes.”

“Have you no assistance—nobody to nurse you?”

“Nobody but these,” pointing to the children.

“Has any doctor seen her?” demanded Mary of the eldest child.

“No, ma’am,” replied the little girl.

“And how long has she been ill?”

“Ever since she com’d from the mill.”

“And how long is that?”

“A twelvemonth,” said the little one.

“I don’t know,” said the elder.

“But, my poor children, you are not the only people that live with her, I suppose? Have you got any father?”

“Yes.”

“ Where is he ?”

“ At the mill.”

“ Have you got anybody else belonging to you ?” said Miss Brotherton, shuddering.

“ There’s Sophy, and Dick, and Grace,” replied the eldest child.

“ Where are they all ?” again inquired Miss Brotherton.

“ At the mill,” was again the answer.

“ Are Sophy and Grace grown up ?”

“ Sophy is,” answered the child, “ and Grace, almost.”

“ Then why do they not stay at home, one of them at least, to take care of this poor woman ?”

“ ’Cause they mustn’t. I ’tends mother.”

“ You are not big enough to take care of her, my poor child. Why don’t you go to the factory, and let one of the bigger ones stay at home ?”

“ They won’t have me now, ’cause of this.” —And as she spake, the child held up a little shrivelled right-hand, three fingers of which had a joint deficient. “ I can’t piece now, and so they won’t let me come.”

“ And Sophy won’t let me go, ’cause of this,” said the little one, slipping her arm out of a bedgown (which was the only garment

she had), and displaying the limb swollen and discoloured, from some violent contusion.

"My poor little creature! how did you do this?" said Mary, tenderly, taking the little hand in hers, and examining the frightful bruise.

"'Twas the billy-roller," said the little girl, in an accent that seemed to insinuate that the young lady was more than commonly dull of apprehension.

"But how did it happen, my child? Did some part of the machinery go over you?"

"No!—That was me," cried the elder, with a loud voice, and again holding up her demolished fingers. "'Twas the stretcher's billy-roller as smashed Becky."

"'Twas 'cause I was sleepy," said the little one, beginning to cry, for she construed Mary's puzzled look into an expression of displeasure.

"They beats 'em dreadful, ma'am," said the sick woman, evidently exerting herself beyond her strength. "She's a good little girl for work; but they will fall asleep, all of 'em at times, when they be kept so dreadful long."

"But these bruises could not be the effect of beating," said Mary, again examining the arm, "it is quite impossible."

"Why, ma'am, the billy-roller as they beats 'em with, is a stick big enough to kill with; and many and many is the baby that has been crippled by it."

There was something so hollow, so sunken in the woman's voice, that Miss Brotherton felt terrified. The fact that a child of the size of the baby before her should have been beaten with such a weapon, and with such violence, seemed wholly incredible. Again she thought of Sir Matthew Dowling's warning, and wished that she were not alone.

"I am afraid that you are very ill," said she, "and I know not how I can help you. Money I can give, but there is nobody here to make use of it for you."

"Money!" murmured the sinking woman from her layer of straw, "Money, you can give money? Oh! give it, give it. Give it to her—give it to the child; she knows what it is, she knows I am dying for the want of it. It is too late for me, but give it, give it, and may God——"

Here the miserable creature's strength wholly failed; her eyes closed, and, to all appearance, she was already a corpse.

"Oh! this is very dreadful!" cried poor Mary, wringing her hands; "nurse will know

better than me;" and, so saying, she turned eagerly towards the door.

"She be gone, mother, and haven't gived nothing," said the eldest girl, in a voice so mournfully expressive of disappointment, that, spite of her alarm, Mary stopped to take half-a-crown from her purse, which she put into the child's hand.

She looked at the coin, and in a half-whisper ejaculated, "Oh!" Then creeping to the bed, she put it into the palm of her mother's hand, pressing the fingers down upon it, and in an accent of interrogation uttered the word "Bread?"

This Mary heard, but not the answer to it, for she had quitted the scene before it was uttered. On opening the door of the house, she started at seeing Sir Matthew Dowling still within a dozen yards of it; he was standing beside the carriage, with one arm extended to keep the door of it open, and the other resting against the vehicle on the opposite side of the opening, while his head thrust forward within an inch of good Mrs. Tremlett's nose effectually prevented her following her young lady, however much she might have wished to do so. He had, indeed, upon Miss Brotherton's disappearance, reseated the good woman

almost by force, and then addressed her in such a strain as was rapidly working her up to make an attempt to escape from the other side of the carriage, when the reappearance of the young lady released her from her thralldom.

"Mrs. Tremlett!" he said, "are you aware of the awful responsibility which will rest upon you if anything unfortunate happens to your amiable, but most headstrong young lady? All the neighbourhood know, Mrs. Tremlett, that she has, as it were, placed, herself for protection in your hands, refusing all other counsel, and shutting her ears to all other advice, and it is thus that you perform your duty!"

"Good God, sir! what do you mean?" said the good woman, in great agitation. "Let me out if you please, sir. If my young lady is in any danger, it is wicked to keep me sitting here. Let me out, sir!"

"I will let you out, Mrs. Tremlett," replied the knight, still firmly retaining the position which so effectually kept her in, "I will let you out; but first, for her sake and your own, it is my duty to tell you in a few words the sort of place she has now thought proper to enter. Don't struggle, Mrs. Tremlett, but hear me. It is not possible they can do her

any personal injury as long as I am so near the door of the house as at present. Be very sure that from some hole or corner of the filthy premises, some spying eyes are at this moment watching us. There is no danger of her being murdered now, but as sure as you sit there, Mrs. Tremlett, murdered she will be, if she goes without the protection of a powerful arm within such dens of sin and iniquity as she has entered now. One short moment more, Mrs. Tremlett—one short moment, while I tell what the creatures are among whom she has thrown herself. The house is notorious as one of the very worst in Ashleigh. The man is an habitual drunkard, whom I, and my excellent servant Parsons, have endeavoured in every possible way to reform—but in vain. The moment he has got his wages, he goes to the gin shop, and often and often he won't work at all, which of course prevents his family from being in the comfortable, easy circumstances which they ought to be. If he happens to be in the house now, I dare say there is no species of indecent language to which your young lady will not be obliged to listen. As to the mother of the family, I believe she is dying in consequence of a life passed in all sorts of the most abominable wickedness. Indeed, I believe she

is now half mad, for I have been told by some of my people whom I have sent upon charitable visits of inquiry to her, that she lies in her bed inventing the strangest lies imaginable. Indeed some think that notwithstanding she is so near death she still drinks, and that it is nothing but drunken lies that she makes people listen to."

"Pray, pray let me get out, Sir Matthew! Being murdered, sir, is not the only thing from which I should wish to save Miss Brotherton."

"One word more, Mrs. Tremlett, and I have done. The eldest girl is a notorious prostitute. Another, a year or two younger, is going the same way. The boy is suspected of being an extremely skilful thief, and the two younger girls,—for they all work at my factory, Mrs. Tremlett, and I know them well,—the two younger ones are such depraved little wretches, that for the sake of example we have been obliged to turn them out of the mill, though we are in great want of young hands to do the work. Now, madam, I have done, and I leave it with you to judge how far it will be right and proper for Miss Brotherton to continue such frolics as these."

Sir Matthew was in the act of pronouncing the last words of this speech as Miss Brother-

ton opened the door of the house, and stepped out into the street.

On first perceiving her, the knight appeared about to take her hand, for the purpose of replacing her in the carriage; but his attention was called to the sound of many feet suddenly turning the corner of a street which led from a neighbouring factory. It proceeded from the workpeople, who were rushing home in scrambling haste to snatch their miserable dinners.

Gentlemen in Sir Matthew Dowling's situation, and enjoying the species of influence which belongs to it, take little or no pains to avoid meeting the people they themselves employ. They look not in the young eyes to read what sort of blessing cowers there, nor heed the crippled gait, or pallid visage of those who exist but by the poisonous employment which he gives them. But such gentlemen seldom, if they can avoid it, expose themselves to the remarks of any gangs belonging to their neighbours, and no sooner did Sir Matthew become aware that the mill in the next street was pouring forth its fifteen hundred hands, than he turned from the young lady who had passed by without appearing to see him, and taking his horse from the hand of the groom

who held it, sprung with great activity into the saddle, and galloped off the way his indignant son had galloped before him.

Mary Brotherton meanwhile was utterly unconscious of the approaching throng; and intent only upon getting Mrs. Tremlett out of the carriage, turned her eyes neither to the right nor the left, but seizing her by the arm, exclaimed, "Come to me, nurse, come to me!"

The good woman, who was quite as desirous as herself of the re-union, required no second summons, but, more quickly than it can be told, was first by the side of her young mistress in the street, and then entering with her the low door of the dwelling so fearfully described by Sir Matthew.

Had Mrs. Tremlett possessed the power, most assuredly she would have turned the steps of her charge the other way, and for ever have prevented her from exposing herself to the contemplation of such depravity as she had heard described; but knowing perfectly well that no such power was vested in her, the next wish she conceived was to give all the assistance and support she could to the dear wilful girl to whom she had devoted herself.

Aware, as she entered the door, that many eyes followed them, nay, that many steps were stayed, apparently, to watch the spectacle, so rare in Ashleigh, of well-dressed ladies entering the sordid dwelling of operatives, Mrs. Tremlett herself closed the door as soon as they had both passed through it, and looking round upon the desolation of the chamber, trembled with an emotion made up of terror and compassion, at perceiving to what a scene the delicately-nurtured Mary Brotherton had introduced herself.

"This woman is very ill, nurse Tremlett," said the young lady, drawing her close to the bed. "For God's sake tell me what we had better do for her?"

"My dear, dear Miss Mary, come away, and send the doctor to her!" answered Mrs. Tremlett, positively shaking from head to foot, as she contemplated the ghastly countenance of the woman, the filthy rag that imperfectly covered her, and the scanty straw upon which her stiffening limbs were stretched. "This is no place for you, Miss Brotherton! Come with me, I say, this moment, and we will send the doctor, and money, and clothes too, if you like it."

“ If I like it!—Do you think I am amusing myself, Mrs. Tremlett!—Feel her hand—feel her pulse! I believe she is dying.”

These words, though spoken very quietly and deliberately, were uttered in a voice so unlike what she had ever heard from the young lady before, that the old woman became dreadfully alarmed.

“ Oh, good God! she is losing her senses!” were the words she uttered as she threw her arms round the person of Miss Brotherton, and vainly attempted to remove her from the spot on which she stood.

“ Fie upon you, Mrs. Tremlett!” said Mary, sternly; “ do you fancy that you are doing me any good? Be satisfied that I am not losing my senses, and let me request that you will make an effort to recover yours. This woman’s head is too low. My dear mother asked for pillows.” Here the steady voice faltered, but it was now only for a moment. “ I want the cushions from the carriage, nurse Tremlett, will you get them, or shall I?”

Without answering a word the terrified old woman hastened to obey her, and did so in the best manner; for, calling to the tall footman, who continued to stand beside the open door

of the carriage, he obeyed the summons, which he supposed to be preparatory to his young mistress making her exit, by very uncere- moniously thrusting right and left the curious group that still lingered on the threshold.

"Give me the cushions from the carriage, Jones," she said; "make haste, for God's sake!"

The man stared at her for an instant in utter astonishment, and then did as he was ordered.

"Now get upon the box and bid the coach- man drive as fast as he can go to the nearest doctor's—that's Mr. Thomas, I think, in Can- non-street.—Tell him Miss Brotherton has sent for him, and desire him to get into the car- riage directly."

Having uttered these commands as rapidly as she could speak, Mrs. Tremlett carried a couple of the carriage cushions to the bed, and, with the assistance of Mary and the elder child, managed to raise the woman into aposi- tion apparently less distorted and painful than before.

"Have you anything to give her?" said Mrs. Tremlett, addressing the child.

The little girl, without answering, stepped to a sort of cupboard in the wall, and taking thence a pitcher without a spout, and a mug

without a handle, contrived to tilt up the former so as to make it discharge a portion of its contents into the latter.

"It is water," said Mary, watching the operation. "It will not hurt her, will it?"

"Nothing can hurt her, my dear love!" replied Mrs. Tremlett, her eyes filling with tears, as she listened to the altered voice of her gay-hearted girl, whose smiles and frolics she had watched, and indulged, for so many years, but of whose deep feeling she had never conceived any idea till now. "I don't think anything can hurt her now, Mary. Her pulse flutters, and her forehead is quite damp. I have sent for Mr. Thomas, and he will probably be here immediately."

Mary's only answer was silently pressing the hand of her old friend, as she took from it the broken mug of water, and then, kneeling on the sordid floor, she applied it to the pale dry lips of the sufferer.

The poor woman made an effort to meet it, and swallowed a mouthful eagerly; and then, relieved probably by the change of posture, and refreshed by the cool liquid, she stretched out the hand in which she still held Mary's half-crown, and said, "Go, Betsy, buy——"

The child she addressed eagerly seized the

money in the hand that had fingers to close upon it, and flitted through the door in an instant.

The poor woman had again closed her eyes : but her breathing was more tranquil, and Mary hoped she had fallen asleep. With this persuasion she stood perfectly still and silent beside her, her own hand locked, though she was not conscious of it, in the grasp of her deeply affected nurse, while her whole soul seemed settled in her eyes as she fixed them immovably upon what she felt to be the most awful spectacle that a mortal can gaze upon, namely, the passing of a human spirit from life to death.

The little girl, whose swollen and discoloured arm still remained uncovered, probably because she feared the pain likely to attend the replacing it in the sleeve, stood close beside her mother's head, childishly contemplating the cushions which supported it, and apparently as unconscious, as they were, of the heavy loss that threatened her.

But this stillness did not long remain uninterrupted. All the members of the family, who had been named as belonging to the factory, except the father, returned for the purpose of taking such rest and refreshment as

one hour (nearly half of which was consumed by the walk to and from the mill) could permit. The latch was lifted by the eldest girl, a delicate-featured, but dreadfully dirty creature of about seventeen, with a sort of sharp eagerness, denoting the curiosity excited by the sight of the carriage stationed before their dwelling. On perceiving the deathlike countenance of her mother, made distinctly visible by the noonday light that streamed through the open door, she suddenly stopped, clasping her hands together, and uttering, in tones that sounded like a shriek,—“ Oh God! she is dead !”

“ No! not dead !” said Mary solemnly, and without turning her eyes from the object on which they were riveted. “ Not dead!—she is sleeping—Hush!—Do not disturb her !”

Close following on the heels of the first came a second girl, about a year her junior, but with a countenance much less prepossessing. Dirty she was, too—if possible more so than the others; and there was a look of stolid stupidity about her that, but for the sort of reckless audacity which lurked in her eye, might have given the idea of an almost brutal want of animation. A thin consumptive-looking lad, of about fourteen, followed after her,

and closed the door behind him as he entered.

"Oh, mother!" he exclaimed, as her sunken face caught his eye, "I wish I was alongside of ye, and then we'd be buried together!" And, without appearing conscious of the presence of the strangers, he suddenly threw himself upon the tottering bedstead, and, nestling his face close to that of the dying woman, kissed her passionately again and again.

"My boy, you may hasten her going by that," said Mrs. Tremlett gently. "Be still, be still, all of ye!" But, as she spoke, she and Mary too, whose hand she continued to hold, made way for the eldest girl, who now, eagerly but silently pressing forward, dropped on her knees beside the bed, and, throwing her two arms over the emaciated body, remained with streaming eyes that rested piteously on the face of her mother. The second girl looked on, till by degrees her heavy countenance appeared to stiffen into horror, and she too drew near, but with distended and tearless eyes, that seemed to speak more of fear than love.

Mrs. Tremlett looked anxiously into the face of her charge. It was deadly pale, and wore an expression of solemnity so new and strange,

that the good woman threw her arms around her in an agony of fond anxiety, exclaiming, "My Mary, my dear, dear child! come away! Mary, Mary, come away! you can do no good. This scene is not a fit one for you to witness."

"You mistake, nurse. It is fit for me. It is necessary for me. Do not disturb me, nurse Tremlett, do not!" Then, after a short pause, during which her eyes were closed, and her hands crossed upon her breast, she again whispered, "Could she not pray with me? Shall I not ask her to pray with me?"

"My sweet girl, she will not hear you, I think," said the old woman, while the tears streamed down her cheeks. "But you shall be satisfied, my darling." And, approaching the bed, and leaning over the girl who knelt beside it, Mrs. Tremlett, in a low but distinct voice, pronounced the words, "Shall we pray with you?"

She was evidently heard and understood, for the hands, that for some minutes had lain motionless, were with an effort brought together and clasped in the attitude of prayer. Mary, who was eagerly watching her every movement, suddenly stepped forward, and, gliding in between the eldest and the youngest girl, dropped on her knees beside them. Mrs.

Tremlett, following close behind her, knelt also, and then, with trembling lips and faltering voice, but slowly, distinctly, and most reverentially, Mary Brotherton uttered the last and most impressive of those sentences in our litany which is followed by the solemn petition for deliverance. It was with a throb of pleasure at her heart, and an exclamation of thanksgiving from her tongue, that she heard the dying woman answer "Amen!"

Almost at the very instant she did so the latch was again lifted, and Mr. Thomas, one of the three medical practitioners of Ashleigh, entered. Miss Brotherton was not conscious of ever having seen him before; but he, like every one else in the neighbourhood, perfectly well knew the heiress by sight; and now, even now, in the awful chamber of death, bowed low before her.

It would not be easy to describe the feeling with which she turned away from this ill-timed demonstration of respect. Yet it was with no harshness; for the struggle so often going on within us between our better and our worser natures was at this moment, so decidedly in favour of all that was good in her young heart, that there was hardly place for any severer feeling than pity within it.

She had risen from her knees as he made his bow, and, turning gravely towards him, said, "If anything can be done, sir, for this poor woman, let it not be delayed. I fear she is very ill."

"Certainly, ma'am—certainly, Miss Brotherton; my best attention may be depended on. But will you first, my dear young lady, give me leave to observe that I would much rather see you in your carriage than here? I really cannot answer for it. It is in point of fact impossible to say whether there may not be something deleterious, something noxious, in short, to your very precious health in the atmosphere of this room."

"I thank you, sir. Be sure I will take quite sufficient care of myself; but it is not for me that your services are wanted—it is here!"

Sophy, the oldest girl, seemed unconscious of what was going on, for she remained perfectly motionless on the spot where she had first knelt down; while the third sister, who had been sent on the poor mother's last errand for bread, and who had crept back unobserved into the room during the foregoing scene, occupied the space on her right hand, Mary Brotherton having knelt on her

left, so that there was scarcely space for the approach of the smart apothecary.

"Move, my dear girls!" said Mary, gently laying a hand on the shoulder of each.

They both rose; while Mr. Thomas, carefully storing the anecdote in aid of the gossiping part of his practice, looked and listened with astonishment to what seemed to him the very *unnatural conduct* of the rich young lady, and internally exclaimed, "A clear case of religious mania this, as I ever saw! She won't live long, probably. What a match!"

It required no very long examination of the poor patient to discover that her last moment was rapidly approaching.

"Upon my word, Miss Brotherton, I really wish I could persuade you to come away," persisted the medical gentleman, as he once more turned towards her. "The air is becoming more mephitic every instant. This woman is at the last extremity."

"Nothing, then, can be done for her?" said Mary.

"No, ma'am—nothing in the world. Not the whole college, if they were present, could keep soul and body together for another hour, I would venture to say."

On this Miss Brotherton put a fee into his

hand, and bent her head in token that his business there was ended, and that he might depart. But he did not immediately obey the hint, for, pocketing the unwonted golden prize, he seemed anxious to remain a little longer where such blessings abounded, and, returning to the bed, again took hold of the poor woman's hand, and then said in a voice of authority—"Let me have some water."

It was Mary only who seemed to understand his words, and she immediately obeyed them, placing in his hand the broken mug which she had set aside upon the floor. The apothecary put the water to the lips of the poor woman, and she again swallowed a little of it, after which they saw her lips move as if she was making an effort to speak to them.

Mrs. Tremlett leant over her, and then, with a stronger effort, she articulated—"Let me see William!"

"Who is William?" said Mrs. Tremlett, raising herself; "is it one of the children?"

"It be father," said Betsy.

"Where is he to be found?" cried Miss Brotherton, eagerly. "Let him be sought for instantly:—where is he likely to be?"

"At the gin-shop," replied the ungracious Grace.

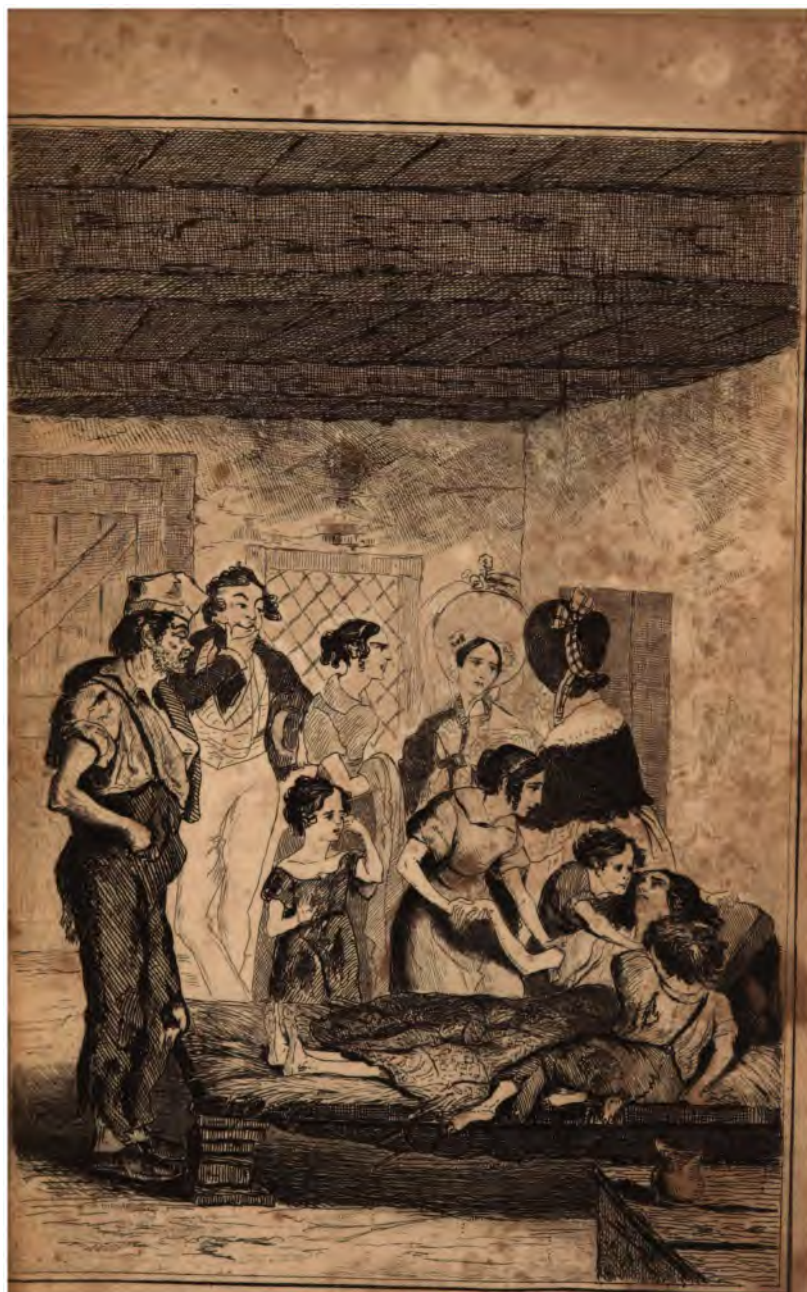
"If you know where he is, go for him," said Mary, impressively; "and, for God's sake, let him not delay!"

The girl she addressed stared at her as upon something utterly incomprehensible; but she obeyed, and, in so short a time as to show that the gin-shop was at no great distance, returned with a man of an exterior as filthy as the rest of his race, wretchedly crippled in the legs, and a complexion that spoke both of ill health and intemperance.

"What!—It is come to that, is it, already?" said the man looking wistfully at his dying wife from the bottom of the bed, but with a countenance whose lines seemed too fixed in the expression of hard indifference to permit its exhibiting much feeling.

"She asked for you, father," said Sophy gently; then taking one of her mother's hands in hers she murmured, "Mother!—dear mother!—open your eyes upon us: father is here, and all of us;" while large tear-drops fell upon the livid face as she hung over it.

The dying eyes were once more opened, and consciousness and recognition of them all were visible as she suffered them to rest first on one, and then on another. The boy only, from his position, she could not see;



Mother! Dear Mother! open your



but, even then, there seemed intelligence between them, and she certainly knew he was lying beside her, for her head rested against his, and she raised her left hand till her fingers touched his cheek. The youngest child also, when the mother's eyes opened, was too much behind her, but she seemed aware of her vicinity, and pronounced the words "*Little one!*" probably her usual appellation, so distinctly as to make the child start and instantly climb upon the bed to kiss her. The last movement was an effort to return this kiss; and the next moment Mrs. Tremlett removed the child's clinging lips from a corse.

A very awful interval of perfect stillness followed. "Can I be of any further service to you, Miss Brotherton?" from the lips of Mr. Thomas, were the first words that broke it.

Poor Mary only shook her head, but Mrs. Tremlett replied, "No, thank you, sir, nothing more;" and, with repeated bows, and, rather a reluctant step, he departed; turning, however, to give another glance at the heiress, as he passed out, for he was not without hopes that she might fall down in a fainting-fit. Nothing, however, of the kind happened, and he disappeared.

"You will go now, Mary, dear?" whispered

Mrs. Tremlett, "and I will come here to-morrow to inquire about them for you."

"Yes, I will go now," replied the young lady; "I cannot comfort them." Then, looking round upon the steadfast group, as if to discover which of them appeared in the fittest state to be spoken to, she fixed upon the little Betsy, and, placing a couple of sovereigns in her hand, told her to take care of them, and give them to her father presently, adding, "Tell your sister Sophy to come up to my house. This," giving a card, "is the place where I live."

She then led the way to her carriage, Mrs. Tremlett followed, and the next moment they were driving rapidly from the abode of the most abject misery to a residence which every quarter of the globe had contributed to render luxurious.

It was evident that the heiress felt no inclination to converse: indeed, for by far the greater portion of the way her face was concealed by the handkerchief which she held to her eyes, and Mrs. Tremlett had too much real feeling to disturb her. After driving, however, through the handsome lodge-gates, and sweeping up to the noble entrance of her mansion, where already, at the sound of her approaching

carriage, two or three servants were seen waiting like a guard of honour to receive her, it seemed that her meditations had not been wholly confined to the death-bed scene she had witnessed, and that the sordid cabin, with its misery-stamped inhabitants, had made a deep impression ; for the first, and for many hours, the only words she uttered after her return, spoken to the ear of Mrs. Tremlett as they walked arm in arm together through the hall, were these :

“ I too am living by the profit of the factory-house. Is the division just?—Oh God, is it holy?”

The old woman felt that she trembled violently, but knew not what words to utter that might compose her.

On arriving at the foot of the stairs, Mary withdrew her arm, and, mounting them more rapidly than her companion could follow, reached her bed-chamber alone, which she entered, closing and bolting the door after her.

CHAPTER II.

Disagreeable meditations—A confidential interview with a faithful servant—Another interview, not quite so confidential with a daughter—Martha and Michael take a pleasant walk together to visit the widow Armstrong—A consultation.

It will be easily believed that Sir Matthew rode back to Dowling Lodge not in the very sweetest humour in the world. "Bring up a child in the way he should go," is an admirable proverb, and certain it is that, when that "way" is agreeable, he does very rarely "depart from the same." Thus it happens that the young gentlemen and ladies, sons and daughters of the millocrats, who pile thousands upon thousands, and acres upon acres, by the secret mysteries of their wonderful compound of human and divine machinery, do rarely or never take their way into the dwellings that shelter and that hide the sufferings of their

operatives. Nothing is so distasteful to a truly elegant mill-owner as any allusion, domestic or foreign, gossiping or professional, religious or political, to his factory, or his factory people ; and the gay fatherly phrase, " Don't talk of that, for God's sake, my dear ! —it smells of the shop," has turned away many innocent eyes from contemplating that which, had they looked upon it, could hardly have endured so long.

To know therefore that the wilful, whimsical, rich, and independent Mary Brotherton (while still too young to understand anything whatever of the real nature of trade and our glorious manufactures),—to know that she was beginning to thrust herself behind the scenes, and do Heaven knows what mischief among his devilish people, instead of minding her own business, and falling in love with his adorable son, was altogether too much to be borne with patience ; and, had it not been that the weather was so hot as to make him long for a draught of hock and iced water, a natural instinct would have made him turn aside from his park-gates, and pursue the by-path which led to his factory, where, as he knew by experience, the sort of temper he was then in could find great relief,

without anybody but the overlookers being in the secret.

As it was, however, Sir Matthew Dowling reached his home ; and the first thing he heard from the man who threw wide its portals was, that Mr. Parsons was waiting for him in his study.

“ Bring me a biscuit, a bottle of Stein, and some iced water,” said the knight in the accent of one not born to “ enter the venerable presence of hunger, thirst, and cold,” nor into that of heat or vexation either.

“ What’s the matter now, Parsons ?” said he, throwing himself into a delicious arm-chair, and perceiving, by one glance at the sour visage before him, that something or other had gone wrong. “ The mill’s not burnt down I suppose, is it ?”

“ And I’m not sure that would be the worst thing that could happen, Sir Matthew, if it was,” replied the confidential servant. “ It is well insured, you know, sir, and would bring in a famous sum, as sure as the Bank ; and that’s more, I take it, than we can say of all our debts.”

“ Who the devil has been gossiping with you about the debts ? What business is that

of yours, I should like to know? Mind your billy-rollers, Mr. Parsons, and take care your hands keep up with your machinery,—that's your work; and I can tell you, if you don't know it already, that the success of the concern depends more upon that than upon any other thing whatever. The building is paid for, and the glorious machinery is paid for—mind that, sir; and where's the interest of it to come from if you let the hands go to sleep over it? I tell you what, Mr. Parsons, an overlooker is not worth his salt if he does not continually keep it in his head that the more the machinery is improved the faster must the brats move to follow it. And you may rely upon it that where this is remembered early and late, day-hours and night-hours, the concern *will* answer, and every manager of it, master or man, will live well. But, by the Lord Harry! where it is not, they are as sure to go to the wrong side of the post as you are to go to bed to-night. It stands to reason, Parsons. If one man knows how to drive, and another doesn't, the one man's team will pay, and the other's won't; and I will be much obliged to any man who will tell me how I am to help being undersold in the market if I don't contrive to make my machinery go as fast, and as long too, as the

best of 'em. That's the business you are to attend to, Mr. Parsons, and I won't trouble you about any other." —

"All true, Sir Matthew, every word of it. And I can't but say though I scorn to be a boaster,—I can't but say, that I think I have given you reason to trust me. I am noted for being able to keep the children awake and going longer than any other man in the mill. There isn't an overlooker in Ashleigh that can equal me with the strap or the billy-roller either, when I chooses to make 'em tell."

"I know all that, my good fellow, and I value your services accordingly. But I have been devilishly put out this morning, and that makes me snappish: besides, I am quite sure you have got something disagreeable to tell, by your face. So out with it, man, and make an end of it."

"Make an end of it, Sir Matthew?" replied Parsons, repeating the last words of the sentence with marked emphasis: "by the Lord, sir, that is exactly what I'm come to beg you to do. You must make an end of your charity job, Sir Matthew, for it don't answer in any way: we have lost one of the nimblest set of fingers we had, that wanted nothing but the strap to keep 'em going for

sixteen hours out of the four-and-twenty; and I wish you could just hear what gratitude you have gained in return for it. There is not a single day comes round that the rickety little Armstrong don't blubber over his work like a church-spout. And I overheard him, the young villain, when he didn't think I was so near—I overheard him, when the scavenger-girl, as was cleaning under the mules, looked up and asked, why for he cried, when his brother had got such good fortune—I heard him answer. And what do you think he said, Sir Matthew?"

"How the devil should I know?" replied the chafed capitalist. "Don't stand mumming there, but out with it."

"Neither more nor less than this, Sir Matthew: 'Don't talk of his good fortune, Bet,' says he; 'he's the most unhappiest boy in all the world,' says he."

"Pestilent little vermin!" exclaimed Sir Matthew through his closed teeth. "Infernal fool that I was to listen to that idiot woman!—and Crockley, too, who ought to know better, has been badgering me exactly with the same execrable nonsense. Never again as long as I live will I be persuaded to try any other scheme with the people than what we have always acted upon. Brutes and beasts they

are, and like brutes and beasts they should be treated ;—and so they shall by me, as long as my head's above ground."

" Well, sir, I can't but say I am glad you are come back to your right mind, as one may call it. Such romantical goings on can never answer in a factory, Sir Matthew. It an't the way to do business, and business is what we have got to do. And so, sir, I hope you will send that scamp Mike back to the mill to-morrow morning, for they can't say no worse of it, let us pay him off as we will, than that he's the most unhappiest boy in all the world. And that's what they says already."

" It won't do, Parsons. That boy must be got rid of. What do you stare for, you ass? Do you think I am going to get hanged for him?"

" Oh! dear no, Sir Matthew—you know the value of your own life better than that, any how—God forbid you should not! Only I did not overwell understand what you meant by getting rid of him."

" I must contrive to send him out of the way, at least out of this neighbourhood; and moreover, with his own consent and his mother's too. That is what I meant, Mr. Parsons."

" You must know best, Sir Matthew; but

it seems to me you are taking a deal of trouble about him. If you'll just let me have him back in the mill, I think I'll venture to say that he shall never get within reach of plaguing you any more—and I'd get a penny-worth out of him into the bargain."

"For a tolerably sharp fellow, Parsons, you're devilish dull about this business. Can't you guess that I should not be taking all the trouble you talk of about such a beggar's brat as that unless I had reasons for it. There's that lord's daughter that got me into the scrape, won't she be ferreting and ferreting till she finds out that the sweet little master has not found himself comfortable here? And ten times worse than her,—ay, a hundred-fold, is that obstinate headstrong girl of old Brotherton's. My Lady Clarissa might be troublesome from mere folly, and might perhaps be stopped short in any mischief she was doing by a few words from me. But not the old one himself could stop Mary Brotherton if she got a whim in her head. You should have seen her just now, Mr. Parsons, raving at me with her colour up and her eyes flashing, for all the world as if she had just escaped out of Bedlam, only because I cautioned her against going into Joe Drake's pigsty,—a pretty place, wasn't

it, for a girl of her fortune to go visiting? But in she went, by heaven! and you may rely upon it, if such a girl as that, who cares for nothing and nobody, once gets it into her head to go about among the factory-people, she'll kick up more dust than we shall find it easy to lay again. I've been told already, by one who I suspect wanted to put me on my guard, that this Mary Brotherton wished to have a little talk with Michael Armstrong. I can put two and two together as well as Miss Mary. She was at our cursed play last night, and I'll bet my life to a rotten egg that she wants to ask him what he cried for."

"Likely enough, sir," replied the overlooker with a grim smile. "I heard of the crying, I won't say that I didn't. You may guess, Sir Matthew, that it was a good deal talked about among the servants—and then t'other of 'em blubbering away at the mill must give a pretty notion, mustn't it, sir? of your goodness to 'em."

"Say no more about it, it makes me mad!" exclaimed the knight. "One or both of 'em shall be sent to Deep Valley mill, Parsons, if I die for it!"

There's none but 'prentices taken in at

the mill in the deep hollow, Sir Matthew, if you mean that."

"Yes, sir, I do mean that," replied Sir Matthew, with a very ominous frown; "and there Master Michael Armstrong shall go, 'prentice or no 'prentice, or I'll give him up my place, and take his."

"That's all, then, Sir Matthew," said the overlooker, preparing to depart. "I com'd to put you up to the boy's ingratitude, and have nothing further to say at present."

"You need not trouble yourself any more about that, Mr. Parsons. I will take care of him," replied the knight. Whereupon Mr. Parsons made a bow and departed.

Sir Matthew Dowling had already taken one tumbler of hock-and-water. He now took a second, and then, throwing himself back in his arm-chair, indulged for several minutes in very deep meditation. At the end of that time it seemed as if the good Rhine wine had done its office, for suddenly the knight's countenance became animated; the heavy gloom which had rested upon it disappeared; and, springing to his feet, he rang the bell with a sort of lively jerk which showed he had some project in hand that he greatly relished.

It was the lively Peggy who answered the summons; but, though she entered almost out of breath from the eagerness with which she had traversed the passage which led from the kitchen to the study, and though she brought into immediate activity all the *agaceries* of which she was capable, a smiling nod was all she got in return, so eager did Sir Matthew appear to say, "Go to Miss Martha, Peggy, as fast as you can, and tell her to come here to me this very minute. Go, my dear, and make haste, there's a good girl."

Peggy was disappointed and angry, for she had a great deal to tell Sir Matthew about Michael Armstrong's ungratefulness, and all that the servants thought and said about it: but the command she had received was too peremptory to be trifled with; and, though she very nearly slammed the study-door in shutting it, she failed not to deliver her message, which was instantly obeyed with the most dutiful alacrity by Martha.

"Did you send Peggy for me, papa?" said she in entering.

"Yes, Martha, dear, I did. How are you to-day, my dear girl? I have not seen you before this morning. Sit down, love, sit down;

I want to talk to you, Martha. I have got something upon my mind that vexes me, and I am going to open my heart to you about it."

"Oh, my dear, dear papa!" returned Martha, "I should be so glad if I could be of any use to you!"

"You can, Martha—you can be of great use and comfort to me. In the first place you must be my father-confessor, and let me confess my faults to you, and I hope you will give me absolution if you can; for I really am very uncomfortable."

"What *can* you mean, papa?"

"Why, my dear, I mean that I have been foolish enough to put myself in a great pet, when I ought not to have done any such thing. It is always wrong to let temper get the better of one; but in this case it was particularly so. You know the fuss that has been made about this little fellow that I have taken out of the factory—I do assure you, my dear girl, that I really intended to be a very kind friend to him. But I got so provoked at his crying upon the stage last night in that beautiful speech that was written for him, that I cuffed him soundly for it when he came off; and I am sadly afraid that I frightened the poor little fellow so violently that he will never feel

comfortable and at his ease with me again. You cannot think how this vexes me."

"Oh! my dear papa, he will never remember it any more if you will please to forgive him." And Martha's heart bounded with joy as she spoke, to think how completely Miss Brotherton's opinion would be changed could she but hear her father speak thus amiably of what had passed.

"No, Martha, no; I cannot bear to see his frightened look. And besides, my dear, I shall never be sure of myself—you know how hasty I am!—I should live in perpetual terror lest anything should tempt me to give him a cuff. There are other reasons, too, my dear Martha, which induce me to think that I should be doing the little fellow and his family infinitely more service, if I apprenticed him to some good trade, than he could ever gain by running about Dowling Lodge."

The excellent good sense of this observation struck Martha as very valuable, and she uttered the most cordial approbation of the wisdom and goodness from whence it proceeded.

"I am exceedingly glad you agree with me, my dear child," proceeded Sir Matthew, "for I have an idea that you could be very useful in

making the arrangement. Do you happen to know where the little boy's mother lives, my dear Martha?"

"No, papa—but Michael could show me."

"Then you should have no objection to pay her a visit on this business, my dear?"

"Oh! dear no! I should like it so much!"

"Very well, my love—then you shall set out immediately if you will. Or stay—it would perhaps be better to get you the paper first that they will have to sign. You must remember to tell them, Martha, that I shall undertake to pay all the fees. It certainly is an excellent thing for a poor family like Armstrong's to have a boy 'prenticed to a good trade. I trust the mother will not refuse her consent from any selfish notion that she may lose the boy's help thereby, it would be really very wicked. You may tell her, my dear, that I shall continue to send her down nice and nourishing food, and that little Michael shall be taught to write, and be well instructed every way; so she may be quite easy about him, and he will be sure to send her a letter every now and then." The knight concluded with a smile of kindness, that perfectly enchanted his daughter.

"Oh, my dear, dear papa!" she said, "how

few people there are who know you as well as I do! Let me go and look for Michael now, papa, shall I? I should like to go down to his mother with him at once, and tell her of your great goodness. The papers could be sent afterwards, you know."

"Very well, dear, trot away then;—get your bonnet and parasol, find your little squire, and then come back here to me to receive my last instructions."

As soon as the happy-looking Martha had left the room the bell was again rung, and on this occasion answered by a footman,—the lively Peggy choosing to turn herself another way as soon as she heard it.

"Is Parsons gone?" demanded Sir Matthew of the servant.

"No, Sir Matthew, he is in the servants' hall," was the reply.

"Desire him to step here directly."

Though the overlooker was enjoying some very comfortable refreshment, he promptly obeyed the summons, and as soon as he had again entered the study, and shut the door behind him, his master said, "Do you know, Parsons, whether the woman Armstrong can read?"

"Yes, sir, I know she can—and that's one

reason why she is so outdacious about the workhouse and every thing. There's nothing on earth does so much mischief among the mill people as making scholars of 'em," said the man.

"I know that well enough, who doesn't? But you may go now, I only wanted to ask you that one question," replied the master.

Once more alone, the knight again took to meditation. Profound as was the state of ignorance respecting all things beyond their own wretched dwellings in which the operatives at that time were kept, Sir Matthew had some misgivings as to the possibility that the name and fame of Deep Valley mill might have reached even Hoxley-lane. If it had, the sending to a woman who could read, indentures by which her child should become bound to that establishment till the age of twenty-one, was running a risk of more opposition than he wished to encounter. But he had a ready wit, and seldom remained long at a loss how to manage any business on which his mind had fixed itself. When Martha returned, therefore, he was quite ready with his last instructions.

"Have you found the little boy, my dear?" said he mildly.

"Yes, papa, he is waiting for me in the hall. Foolish little fellow! I believe he fears that you are very angry with him, and he looked so much alarmed that I would not bring him in."

"Poor child! But you were quite right, my dear Martha. It is better not to harass him in any way. Now then, Martha, what you have got to do is this. Explain to the poor woman that it is my wish to keep my promise of providing for her boy; but that I am come to the persuasion that the apprenticing him to some respectable business will be better than letting him run about the place here learning nothing. You may talk to the little boy, you know: he is a sharp child, and I have no doubt will come to the same conclusion himself, if you state the thing to him properly."

"I have no doubt of it, papa," answered the innocent Martha: "I will do my very best to make him understand it. And what trade shall I tell Mrs. Armstrong you have chosen for him?"

"Stocking weaving, my dear, I really don't know a better; and we may be able to help him in that if he behaves well as he goes on."

"Well then, papa, now I may go?"

"Yes, my dear, now you may go—and you

may just tell the woman, Martha, that if she approves the plan, I will call upon her myself some day with the papers, A pleasant walk to you ! Good bye."

* * * * *

It was a very pleasant walk, for Martha was delighted with her companion. She opened to him kindly and clearly the plan for his being put apprentice to a respectable trade, and pointed out to his young but quick capacity the advantage this would give him in after life, and the power he might hope to possess, if he behaved well, of providing for his mother and brother.

" 'Tis that what I should like best of all things," said Michael. " Because, please, ma'am, I know I must help 'em, as they beant neither of 'em so strong as I be."

" You are a good boy, Michael, for thinking of them so much as you do. That is the reason I take notice of you, and love you."

The little fellow nestled closer to her side, as they walked on, and raising the hand that held his, he laid it upon his shoulder, and pressed his cheek upon it with very endearing fondness.

" What an affectionate little heart it is !" thought Martha, " and how very happy I shall

be if I can help to get this business settled for him !”

Of course Miss Martha Dowling had never been in Hoxley-lane before; and notwithstanding her having so agreeable a companion, she speedily became aware that the region was as unpleasant as it was new.

“Is this the only road, my dear boy, by which we can get to your mother’s house?” said she, almost mechanically enveloping her offended nose in her pocket-handkerchief.

‘It is here that we lives, please, ma’am,” said the child, pulling her onwards.

“How very foolish of me !” thought Martha, withdrawing her handkerchief, “of course poor people live in poor houses. But I cannot think why the place should smell so !”

No. 12 was however soon reached, and the young lady carefully led by her little attendant through the largest gap in the hedge to the outer door of the back kitchen, in order that she might escape Mrs. Sykes’s crowded front one.

“Go in first, Michael, and tell your mother that I am coming,” said the considerate Martha. The child did so, but in this case there was no means for preparation, and having named the unexpected visitant, and given

his mother a hasty kiss, he returned before Martha had recovered the sort of shock which the dirty and desolate spot on which she stood had occasioned.

In truth no person unaccustomed to approach the dwellings of the operatives in the towns of the manufacturing districts can fail to be startled at the first near sight of them. In the very poorest agricultural village, the cottages which shelter its labours have the pure untainted air of heaven to blow around their humble roofs; but where forests of tall bare chimneys, belching eternal clouds of smoke rear their unsightly shafts towards the sky, in lieu of verdant air-refreshing trees, the black tint of the loathsome factory seems to rest upon every object near it. The walls are black, the fences are black, the window-panes (when there are any) are all veiled in black. No domestic animal that pertinaciously exists within their tainted purlieus, but wears the same dark hue; and perhaps there is no condition of human life so significantly surrounded by types of its own wretchedness as this.

Martha Dowling shuddered as she looked round her; and when Michael returned to lead her in, she felt half afraid of crossing the gloomy threshold.

But the widow Armstrong was, as usual, less dirty in her abject misery than, perhaps, any other inhabitant of Hoxley-lane, or its immediate neighbourhood, and the mild countenance and gentle voice with which she replied to the young lady's salutation removed all her scruples, and she seated herself in the chair placed for her by Michael, with the best disposition in the world to improve the acquaintance.

"I hope you are getting better, Mrs. Armstrong?" said Martha, in that tone of genuine female softness which it is so impossible to mistake; "and that you don't miss little Michael as much as you did at first?"

"You are very kind, ma'am, to take the trouble of coming to such a place as this," replied the poor woman, in a voice that indicated something like surprise.

Upon which Michael, who had stationed himself near enough to enable him to slip his little hand into hers, said, with a tolerably expressive emphasis, "This is Miss Martha, mother."

"I wish, ma'am, I had strength and power to thank you as I ought, for all your condescending kindness to my poor boy!" said the widow earnestly. "I never see him, that he has not some fresh story to tell me of your

goodness to him. He can read a chapter in the Bible now as well as any boy of his age need to do. And oh, Miss, this is all owing to you—for never could he have given his time to it in the factory !”

“There is more praise due to him than to me, Mrs. Armstrong, I assure you. He is a very good boy at learning, and minds every word that is said to him. I suppose he has shown you his copy-book too, hasn’t he? I never saw a child that had so good a notion of writing.”

“He was always a quick boy, Miss—but never can he be thankful enough to you for teaching him how to put his quickness to profit. It will be the making of him.”

“I am very glad to hear you speak so earnestly about his learning, because that makes me think that you will be pleased at hearing the business I am come upon. My papa, who is very”—here poor Martha stopped short. She was going to add, “*kind to little Michael,*” but her honest heart would not let her pronounce the words: so she changed the phrase, and went on with “very desirous of being really useful to Michael, has commissioned me, Mrs. Armstrong, to ask you if you do not think it would be more profitable and

advantageous to him to be apprenticed to some good trade, the stocking-weaving, for instance, than to run about our house any longer. Papa says he fears it will give him habits of idleness which he may be the worse for all his life—and that would be quite contrary to his wishes, which have always been that he should benefit all his life long, by his good behaviour about the cow.”

Mrs. Armstrong’s eyes, which had been fixed on the countenance of Martha, every line of which spoke of truth and sincerity, fell upon the work she held in her hand as these words were uttered—and for a moment she made no answer. But feeling, perhaps, that this was both ungrateful and ungracious to her visitor, she looked up again and said, “ I am sure, ma’am, we can never thank you enough for all your kindness.”

There was the slightest emphasis in the world upon the word “*you*,” but it was enough to heighten the colour of Martha, and for a moment she both felt and looked displeased.

“ My power, of myself, to befriend your boy, Mrs. Armstrong, is very little, I assure you,” she said. “ Of course it is natural that I should take more notice of him than a person like my father can, who has so many other

things to attend to; but it is to his generosity and benevolence that you must look for any lasting advantage you may hope to gain for him."

"Indeed, ma'am, I would be happy to take your advice in the disposal of him any way; for I can't mistake your kindness or your power to judge what is best, which of course must be greater than mine, notwithstanding your young age—and if Michael likes it, and you think it best, ma'am."

Martha saw that the mother's fear of having her boy parted from her was combating the wiser hope for his future advantage; and fully conscious that the continuing his present mode of life could only be productive of mortification, she boldly answered this appeal, and in the confiding innocence of her heart ventured to say, "Perhaps, in this case, girl as I am, my judgment *may* be better than yours, Mrs. Armstrong. I do not think it would be good or pleasant for Michael in any way to continue living at the Lodge as he does at present; and I do think, that if put to a respectable trade he may not only provide for himself, but be a help and comfort to you and his brother likewise. This is my opinion, certainly, and now ask his. He is still younger

than me, to be sure, poor little fellow, and yet I think you ought to listen to his opinion."

"Well, Mike, dear," said the widow, turning her head towards the child, "you hear what the young lady says; speak up, my dear, and tell us what you think about it."

"I be ready to go, mother, if she bids me, and you like it," replied the boy.

"You can judge, ma'am, that he knows his duty. That is just like him. From the time he was able to speak, dear creature, it was always the same—gentle, good, and reasonable. I won't say but what the parting with him will be a sore trial to me, but God forbid that I should set the wishes of my worn-out life against the hopes of his young one. How far away is it, miss, do you happen to know where the master stocking-weaver bides as he's to go to?"

Martha confessed her ignorance on this point; but added, that though she should be sorry to hear it was too far off for him occasionally to come home and pay her a visit, she should be more sorry still were he to be placed in the town of Ashleigh. "It would be only putting him for ever in the way of temptation, Mrs. Armstrong," said she; "and I am sure

you are too sensible a woman to wish that he should be where doing his duty was likely to be a pain to him."

"Indeed and that I would," said the poor woman, earnestly. "'Tis the seeing their poor young faces for ever so sad and careworn, that is the worst trial of all."

"How true is what my dear father says about the factory people," thought Martha—"how wonderfully they do all hate work!"

This conviction of their epidemic idleness, however, in no degree chilled the good girl's desire at once to perform her father's will, and benefit a very interesting, though not, as she believed, a very industrious mother and son. So deeming it best to enter into no further discussion, but to accept the consent uttered by both as final and conclusive, she rose, and smiling good-humouredly at Michael said,

"Now you have taught me the way here, I think I shall be able to get back again by myself; and I dare say, Michael, that you and your mother will like to have a little conversation together about this new plan for you. But remember, dear, that you are home by five o'clock to read your lesson and show me your copy-book: we were interrupted this morning, you know." Then leaving in

the poor widow's hand a welcome token of her visit, and promising that she would either bring or send the papers necessary for her to sign, before long, the excellent Martha Dowling departed, after having most innocently, but most effectually, lent her aid to the perpetration of as hateful a crime as the black heart of long hardened depravity could devise.

Having waited till the figure of the young lady had passed across the little window, the widow Armstrong pulled her boy towards her, and gave him a mother's kiss.

"To be sure thee dost look all the better, my Mike, for good food and fine clothing. But I shan't be satisfied, unless you tell me that you like all these new favours that they are going to confer upon you."

"I like to go, mother, very much," replied Michael, stoutly.

"Thank God! then, my darling—you are provided for," she rejoined with a deep sigh. "I have known a many stocking-weavers, Mike, exceeding well to do, and there was never one of them, I'll answer for it, that had a better will to work, and to do his duty, than you have—so I have no right to doubt but what you will do well, and I don't doubt it.

But 'tis the parting with thee, my dear, dear child! Oh! Mike, you have been a comfort to me ever since you was born—and how do I know, if——”

“Mother!” cried the boy, interrupting her, “I’ll be a comfort to you still. I’ll tell you what I’ve got in my head to do, and just see if it is not a good plan. I mean to be the very best boy that ever my master had, and when I’ve gone on working with him a bit, two or three months, perhaps, mother,—time enough for him really to find out that I am a good boy,—I will tell him all about you and Teddy, and make him understand that if he wants to keep me in good heart to work, he must let me trudge away home to pass a Sunday now and then with you two. I don’t think he’ll be able to say nō, mother, when I tell him about Teddy’s poor legs, and all you have done for us both, lying a-bed here.”

Mrs. Armstrong again kissed her boy, and after gazing at him with a look in which pride and pleasure were strangely blended with anguish, she said, “I do think you’ll make your way, Michael, for you are a good boy, a very good boy. But I don’t know how poor Edward will take it.”

“That’s the worst part of it, mother,” replied the little fellow, beginning to cry. “Poor

Teddy does look so very happy of a night when he sees me pop round the corner upon him, as he comes out of the factory! But then I shall be able to help him, mother, all the better by and by. And when I come home of a Sunday, mother, I must teach him to write, and then think how beautiful to have a letter from one another: I know who'll give me a slate for Teddy, and me too, to learn with, and that's Miss Martha. And I shan't mind asking her, not the least, because she knows I am going away. And do you know, mother, I've got another notion, and that's no bad comfort neither. I should not a bit wonder if Miss Martha was to turn out a right good friend to you and Teddy, when I am gone."

And so the little fellow ran on—each hopeful word he uttered begetting a new hope, till, by the time the hour of departure arrived, his poor mother had at least the comfort of believing that the prospect opening before him was one that he looked upon with much less of pain than pleasure.

Meanwhile Martha found her way safely home, and gave her father such an account of the result of her mission as induced him to give her a kiss, and declare that if she was not the handsomest of the family, she was out-and-out the most useful.

CHAPTER III.

Mary Brotherton continues sick in heart and mind—But is roused and cheered by her own stedfast will—An o'er true Tale.

It was not till the second dinner-bell had rung, that Mrs. Tremlett ventured to seek Mary in her chamber.

The worthy woman was perfectly aware that the naturally strong feelings of her young mistress had been violently affected by the scene they had witnessed, and though perhaps from comprehending the effect it had produced on her mind, she was conscious that she should do no good by obtruding herself uncalled for upon her retirement.

But when the signal that always brought them together had passed unheeded, she became uneasy, and availing herself of the privilege that long and well-requited affection gave, she knocked at her door and called upon her name.

Miss Brotherton answered the summons immediately; but her withdrawing the bolt of her door, as well as the unchanged appearance of her dress, showed that she had not been occupied in preparing for dinner.

"You are not aware how late it is, my dear child, the second dinner-bell has rung!" said Mrs. Tremlett looking anxiously in her pale face.

"Has it?" replied the young lady; "indeed, I beg your pardon—but I will not keep you waiting, I will not dress to-day, if you will excuse it."

"No, no, my dear, that won't do. Never mind about the dinner, I will tell them to take it out again."

"Indeed, I do not wish to dress," said Mary languidly. "Morgan will tease me by asking what dress I choose to wear and fifty questions besides. Let me go down as I am, nurse Tremlett."

"You shan't have Morgan at all, dear. The dressing will refresh you, my darling child; and it won't be the first time, Mary, that I have done all that you wanted in that way. There—just sit down on the sofa for one minute, and I will speak about the dinner, and be back again."

It was very passively that Mary did as she was bid, and without another word of remonstrance sat down and awaited the return of her old friend. She was indeed completely exhausted: the scene she had witnessed had not touched only, it had wrung her heart; and the hours she had passed since were not such as to bring her spirits back to their ordinary tone. It was not alone the melancholy spectacle of a fellow-creature passing from life to death which had thus strongly affected her—it was the frightful degradation of the group of human beings who had gazed upon it with her. It was the horrible recollection of the dying woman's statement respecting the lacerated flesh of her child—and it was the filth, the misery, the famine, and the vice that she had been warned of, and had seen, which had set her powerful, healthy, unprejudiced, and unselfish mind to meditate upon the state of things which had produced it.

It was hardly possible for any one to be more profoundly ignorant upon the subject which had thus seized upon her heart than was Mary Brotherton. On the question of negro slavery she had from her very earliest infancy heard a great deal, for her father was an anti-(black)-slavery man, who subscribed to the

African society, and the missionary fund; drank Mr. Wilberforce's health after dinner whenever he had company at his table; and while his own mills daily sent millions of groans to be registered in heaven from joyless young hearts and aching infant limbs, he rarely failed to despatch with nearly equal regularity (all booked for the same region) a plentiful portion of benevolent lamentations over the sable sons of Africa, all uttered comfortably from a soft arm-chair, while digestion was gently going on, and his well-fed person in a state of the most perfect enjoyment. On the slavery question, therefore, Mary really knew a great deal, and felt concerning it as every true Christian must feel. But as to every thing concerning the nature of the labour performed in the factories by whose chimneys her pleasant park was surrounded—the age, sex, or condition of the labourers—the proportion of their daily existence devoted to toil—the degree of care bestowed on their immortal souls—or the quantum of enjoyment permitted to them by their earthly masters, while awaiting a summons to the presence of their heavenly one—of all this Mary Brotherton was as ignorant as the sleek lapdog that dozed upon her hearth-rug. But this

carefully-adjusted cloud was now passing away from her intellect for ever. If

“Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise,”

that folly had seized upon her; for no longer was she destined to taste the doubtful joy of luxury that had never looked upon the seamy side of existence, or dreamed that the means that supplied its exquisite, yet almost un-noted refinements, were earned by the agony of labouring infants. But though this worse than fools' paradise was thus closed upon her for ever, she felt a power and energy of purpose awaked within her heart, that she thanked God upon her bended knees for giving, though she trembled as she received it. And never did sainted nun breathe purer or more earnest vows of self-devotion to heaven, than did this ardent-spirited girl to the examination, and, if possible, to the relief of the misery she had at length learned to know existed round her.

But like most other persons when occupied by a really profound emotion, Mary felt no inclination to talk about it. She had not indeed the slightest intention to conceal anything she did from Mrs. Tremlett; but, on the contrary, hoped eventually to gain much assistance from her strong practical good sense: but she

could not discuss, she could not reason, she could not prate about it now, and she went through the business of the dinner-table so tranquilly, that her watchful companion felt rejoiced, though a little surprised, at her recovered composure.

Soon after they retired from table, Mary proposed a walk in the grounds, and as they wandered together through the richly-scented flower-garden, and then seated themselves where the cool breeze of evening brought the tempered fragrance to their senses more delightfully still, the feverish feeling of tightness across her forehead seemed to relax, and as if to apologise for the silent fit that had seized her, Mary looked kindly into the face of her old friend, and then bent forward and kissed her.

"Bless you, my dear love, you feel better now, don't you?" said the affectionate old woman.

"Yes, dear nurse, much better. The air is delicious to-night."

"It was too much for you, my dear child, that dreadful scene this morning! My dear Miss Brotherton, you must be reasonable, indeed you must, or instead of making me the very happiest being in the world, as you do

now, my life will become one of continual terror and alarm. You can do no good, my dear, in putting yourself in such places as we were in to-day."

Mary reflected for a moment before she answered her, and then said, "Are you quite sure, nurse Tremlett, that a young woman without any natural ties whatever, and with a fortune so large as mine, can do no good by making themselves acquainted with the condition of their poor neighbours?"

"Oh! no, Miss Mary, dear, I never said that. You do a great deal of good by putting the gardener's and under-gardener's children to school; and by all the help you give them and every body else that works about the place, and I dearly love to see you do it, and I have no doubt in the world that it keeps many from sending their children to the mills, and it will bring a blessing upon your head, my dear. But that's nothing to do with poking yourself into such a place as you got into to-day. You never heard anything so dreadful as what Sir Matthew Dowling was telling me about them, before you came out the first time."

Mary shuddered as she heard his name.

"You will promise me, dear, won't you, never

to go to such a horrid place again?" resumed the old woman.

"We will not talk about that now, my dear Mrs. Tremlett; I want you to tell me what you think I could do that would be most useful for those poor young girls. I know what it is to lose a mother, dear nurse, and it makes me feel for them."

"God bless your kind heart, my dear! That is just like you, and I wish, with all my heart and soul, that you lived somewhere among the farming people, for there you would have some reward for your charity. But God help me! If one-half of what Sir Matthew told me is true, these horrid girls are worse than it is decent to tell you, and the father's as bad."

"But don't you think, my good friend, considering that I am more than come to years of discretion, and that you are a good deal older still, don't you think it might be as well for us, in a case of such importance as this, to see and judge for ourselves, instead of taking Sir Matthew Dowling's word for it?" said the heiress, while a slight frown contracted her brow.

"Why, yes, Miss Mary,—only it is so difficult to come at the truth," replied Mrs. Tremlett.

"Surely there is one truth that it is easy enough to come at. I suppose you have no doubt upon your mind that these people are in dreadful distress?"

"Wicked people almost always are, Miss Mary."

"Then it is my duty, Mrs. Tremlett," replied Mary almost sternly, "to endeavour, at least in the case of such very young people, to amend, or prevent their wickedness. It would be a frightful sin—worse in me, burdened as I feel myself with riches earned by the labour of such miserable little creatures as those whom we saw to-day—if I should look upon such utter destitution, let it be mixed up with what frailty it may, and pass along on the other side. I will not do it, Mrs. Tremlett, so never ask it more. At present all I know is, that I have seen misery. Its cause I have yet to learn: this may be the work of time, and I do not mean to wait till I have acquired such knowledge before I relieve the want and woe I have witnessed. I left word that the eldest girl was to come up to me. She will hardly delay doing so, poor creature, therefore I must again postpone my intended visit to Hoxley-lane, for I will not go out to-morrow till I have seen her."

All this was very contrary to Mrs. Tremlett's judgment, for she had a very natural dread lest the warm heart of her young charge should be imposed upon by the designing and depraved. Nevertheless there was a feeling of respect that came upon her involuntarily, and as it were unawares, as she listened to the firmly-spoken purpose of the young girl whom as yet she could hardly persuade herself was more than a child.

In pursuance of the resolution thus declared, Miss Brotherton did not stir from home during the whole of the following day. Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, Mrs. Gabberly, and one or two more distant neighbours called; but she was denied to them all, from the fear that her anticipated interview with Sophy Drake might be interrupted. But the precaution was unnecessary; the long morning wore away without the girl's making her appearance, and it was not till past eight o'clock in the evening that a servant entered the drawing-room, and informed Miss Brotherton that a very dirty girl and two little children were at the gate, who said she had given them orders to call.

"It is very true," replied the young lady. "These are the people I told you to let in."

The man retired in silence, but paid him-

self for his forbearance by the vehemence of his wondering commentary in the servants' hall.

Mary Brotherton was sitting at an open window, with the last light of evening falling upon her and the volume she held in her hand.

She had been making what proved but an idle effort to read, even when that light was stronger; but now, the volume hung listlessly from her hand, while her eyes, fixed on the brightly tinted vapours in the west, seemed to look athwart them, and like the worthy gentleman on the platform before Tilbury Fort, to gaze on many things that were "*not yet in sight.*" Mrs. Tremlett, with the happy indifference to the increasing twilight peculiar to the sisterhood of knitters, continued at another window to manœuvre her bright weapons, and vary the successive fronts of her phalanx with no louder note of command than was occasionally produced by the gentle clicking of her needles against each other. It was nearly an hour since a word had been exchanged between them; but now as the footman left the room, Mary turned towards her, and said,—
"This is poor Sophy, Mrs. Tremlett. Come

and sit near me, will you? I want you to hear all she says."

Her old friend moved her place accordingly, and had just seated herself by the side of Miss Brotherton when the door again opened, and Sophy Drake, leading a little sister in each hand, entered the drawing-room.

It required no force of contrast to render the miserable, squalid, unhealthy appearance of these poor girls most painfully striking: if it had, the elegant apartment into which they now entered would have furnished it. Mary's heart smote her as she gazed upon them. "So young—so pretty too!" thought she, "and yet so painful to look upon!"

The eldest of the three looked languid, weary, spirit-broken, and inanimate, hardly throwing a glance at the novel objects around her, and looking more fit to lie down and rest the aching limbs she slowly dragged along, than to indulge any feeling of curiosity. The little ones had the same unsteady tired gait, but they looked up with an expression of wonder, and almost of awe, on every object as they passed along.

"How are you all, my poor girls?" said Mary kindly, as they drew near to her. The



I thought she

*so young so pretty, too, thought she - and yet
so painful to look upon.*

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eldest girl dropped a courtesy, but made no audible reply.

"It is so sad and hopeless a grief to lose a mother," continued Miss Brotherton, "that I can say not one word to check your grief. But if there is any thing that I can do to make you more comfortable, I shall be glad to do it. You seem all of you greatly in want of clothes. How comes that, when so many of the family work, and get wages?"

"The wages isn't enough to buy us bread, ma'am," replied the eldest girl, "and help pay lodging rent."

This statement seemed so very incredible, that Mary felt a painful conviction that the young creature before her was not speaking truth. She remained silent for a minute or two, and then said, "I suppose when you say bread, you mean food of all kinds?—and tea, and sugar, and butter, and so on?" said Mary.

"I have not had the taste of meat in my mouth for above these two years," replied Sophy colouring, and in a voice that seemed to indicate something like indignation—"and as to sugar in our tea, or butter on our bread, no factory child is brought up to it."

Mary coloured too. She longed to get ac-

accurate information respecting their manner of living, and the reasons why incessant labour failed to supply the necessaries of life ; but she knew not well how to set about it.

"Do not be angry with me, Sophy," said she, "if I ask questions that seem unfeeling and very ignorant. I really know little or nothing about the manner in which poor people live, and I want to know. Not merely from curiosity, but because I should like to help them if I could."

"And God knows we want help bad enough, ma'am," replied the girl, while tears started to her eyes. "Father has got the money you gave yesterday, and we shall never hear any more of that."

"Is he a bad father to you then?"

"Not bad to beat us. But he drinks terrible."

"Then I suppose his wages go partly in that?"

"His wages, and our'n too, ma'am. He baint always able to get work. The old hands are often out, and then in course he takes our'n."

"Then if he was a temperate, steady man, you would do a great deal better?"

"In course we should, ma'am. But mother

said he took to it, as most of the others do in all the mills, on account of hating to come home so, when we young ones comes in from work. I have heard mother say that father cried when I, that was the biggest, com'd home first beaten and bruised with the strap and the billy-roller."

"What *is* the billy-roller, Sophy?" inquired Miss Brotherton, in an accent denoting considerable curiosity.

"It's a long stout stick, ma'am, that's used often and often to beat the little ones employed in the mills when their strength fails—when they fall asleep, or stand still for a minute."

"Do you mean, that the children work till they are so tired as to fall asleep standing?"

"Yes, ma'am. Dozens and dozens of 'em every day in the year except Sundays, is strapped, and kicked, and banged by the billy-roller, because they falls asleep."

"But, surely, parents are greatly to blame to let children young enough for that go to work at all?"

"They must just starve, ma'am, if they didn't," replied the girl.

"How many years have you worked in the factory yourself, Sophy?"

"Just twelve, ma'am, this last spring."

"And how old are you?"

"Seventeen, ma'am."

"Twelve from seventeen?—You mean to say that you began to work at the factory when you were five years old?" said Mary, with some appearance of incredulity.

"I was five years and three months, ma'am," answered the girl firmly.

Miss Brotherton looked at Mrs. Tremlett, but perceived no appearance of incredulity on her countenance. "Is this possible, Mrs. Tremlett?" said she.

"Yes, my dear, I believe that it is very common," replied the old woman. "I have often heard it spoken of among the servants."

"Have you ever been at school, Sophy?"

"Yes, ma'am. Afore father changed his mill and took work under Sir Matthew we all—father, mother, Grace, Dick, and all, worked for the great Quaker gentleman, Joseph Tell, and he had a school in the factory for Sundays."

"And you learnt to read there of course?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't;" replied the girl, shaking her head.

"Whose fault was that, my dear?—Surely if you were put to school, you ought to have learnt to read?"

"I couldn't, ma'am, I couldn't—and it was not my fault neither," replied the girl with considerable agitation.

"We was often and often kept going till twelve o'clock on a Saturday night, and when the Sunday comed we couldn't sit down upon the bench, neither Grace, nor Dick, nor I, without falling dead asleep. 'Twas the only right good sleep we had, that before Sundays I mean, 'cause father was always obligated to wake us every other morning afore five o'clock, summer and winter, and earlier than that too, when we worked night-work. So keeping our eyes open on Sundays wasn't possible, 'cause they didn't strap us."

"Then there is not one of you can read?"

"No, ma'am, not one."

"Can your father read?"

"Yes, ma'am, he can. That is he could, he says, when he was younger, but he has almost forgot now. He says, in his young days, the machinery improvements was nothing like what they be now, and that the piecer children hadn't not half so far or so fast to walk as they have now, and he learnt to read of his own mother when he comed home at nights."

"And why doesn't he do the same for his

children as his mother did for him?" said Miss Brotherton.

"Because we couldn't keep our eyes open for two minutes together when we comes home at night. I have seen poor mother, as is dead and gone, lay little Becky here down upon the bundle of straw that she and I sleeps upon, 'cause she couldn't keep up to eat her supper when she comed from the mill—and I have seen her put the sopped bread in her mouth when she was so dead asleep, that she couldn't get her to swallow it—and how could she or the rest of us learn to read, ma'am?"

Mary made no reply, but sat for a moment or two, with her eyes fixed on the ground, in very painful uncertainty as to what she could say or do, that could be of effectual service to the miserable group before her. She felt, that though poor Sophy might perhaps be telling nothing but the truth in this dismal description of her wretched family, it was not from her that any general information could be obtained. It was, as she thought, utterly impossible that it could apply to the hundreds of thousands who, she had heard it stated, as a matter of national pride, by some of her rich neighbours, were employed in the factories of England and Scotland. A moment's thought

sufficed to convince her (as it has done multitudes of amiable-minded ladies and gentlemen besides) that it was perfectly impossible such horrors could exist on the glorious soil of Britain; unless indeed, as in the case before her, the unhappy drunkenness of the father plunged his helpless family into a degree of poverty, which nothing, perhaps, but the unnatural degree of labour described by this poor motherless girl could avert.

"I must clothe them all," thought she, "and put the little ones to school. Perhaps, too, I may find a place in my own kitchen for poor Sophy. But as to learning from her any thing that can be depended upon respecting the system by which the factory labour is regulated, that is quite hopeless."

She felt, however, that the weary-looking group ought not to return empty-handed after their walk, with no reward for it but her promises; and turning to Mrs. Tremlett, asked her in a half whisper what she could give them, that might be made immediately useful in the way of clothing, their garments being in a condition that it was painful to her to behold.

"You might give them that piece of dark cotton, my dear, that you bought the other day for the coachman's children. There is no

great hurry you know about them, for they are not to go to school till next month."

"Very true. It is just the thing," replied Mary; and having rung the bell and ordered her maid to appear, she gave orders to have it brought to her.

"I do not exactly know how much there is of it, Sophy," said she, putting it into her hand, "but enough, I think, for one or two of you, and I will get more of the same sort when next I go to Ashleigh."

Sophy took it with a courtesy; but having held it for a moment said, "Please, ma'am, this won't be no use to me, unless I may pawn part to get the rest made."

"Can you not make a gown for yourself and your sisters, my good girl?" demanded Mary.

"Please, ma'am, I never was learnt to sew," replied the girl, blushing.

More convinced than ever that her first effort to assist the poor operatives had led her by an unlucky chance into a family, whose unthrifty habits made it almost hopeless to attempt doing them any essential service, Mary drew forth her purse, and giving half-a-crown to each of them, took the useless material back, saying, "I will send you some more decent clothes to wear, Sophy—and then

we must think what further can be done for you and these poor little ones. But, indeed, my dear girl, I greatly fear that unless your habits are improved, and that you can be taught to use your needle like all other decent young women, in making and mending what is given you, it will be impossible for me, or for any one, to do you much good."

Poor Sophy Drake looked both sorry and ashamed as she listened to this reproof,—but she attempted not to answer it, and again courtesying as she received the money, she turned away without again speaking, and left the room.

"This is very, very dreadful! nurse Tremlett," said Mary, as soon as they were alone. "I could not have believed that it was possible in such a country as England, to find human beings in a state of such degraded ignorance as that poor girl. Did you ever meet with any thing like it before?"

"I can't say, Miss Mary, that I ever before came within reach of hearing a factory-girl speak so much as I have heard to-day. But I can't pretend to say that I am a bit surprised. I told you, my dear, from the beginning, that you would only get yourself into trouble, and do no good. From the very first

of coming to this country, which was but a month before I came to live with your mamma, I always heard the same history of the factory folks. And you know, my dear, what every body says must be true."

Mary, as she listened to this, looked harassed, puzzled, and wretched. "But is it not something unheard of in the history of the world," said she, "that thousands and hundreds of thousands of persons should exist, all labouring, young and old, with unceasing industry to support themselves, and that this their painful labour should subject them to such habits of inevitable ignorance and degradation, that all decent and respectable persons must be taught to shun them?"

"It does seem very hard upon them, my dear, to be sure," replied her companion; "but as to *why* it is so, I am sure it is impossible for us to guess. It must be partly their own faults of course; but at any rate, my dear, I wish you would not go on, working yourself up so. I can't bear to see you, Miss Mary, looked vexed and miserable for what you can't help the least bit in the world. And besides, my dear, I must say, that it is nowise right for a young lady like you to run the risk of getting near very bad people indeed, whose

ways I don't like to talk to you about. I know you can't abide Sir Matthew Dowling, and I can't say I ever saw or heard of much to like in him; but for all that, there is not any good that I can see in disbelieving what he told us about these very people. He must know more about them than we can, and it was quite shocking I do assure you, Miss Mary, the things he told me. A great deal too bad to repeat, I promise you."

Mary burst into tears. "I am very unhappy, Mrs. Tremlett," said she, "and it is not putting faith in Sir Matthew Dowling that can make me less so. That I may be led to do many things from my great ignorance, which were I better informed I should not do, is very likely; and it is therefore my duty to obtain information upon this tremendous subject as speedily as possible. Would to God, my good friend, that you could give it me! But as you cannot, we will cease to speculate together upon what we neither of us understand. I am sorry that our awful adventure yesterday prevented my purposed visit to the poor woman in Hoxley-lane. We both agreed, you know, that I could get no harm there; and I have an object in view in making that visit that I am sorry to have delayed. We

will go there to-morrow, nurse Tremlett,— and so early in the morning, as to run no risk of meeting any of the fine folks who love to show themselves on the Ashleigh road.”

Mary Brotherton did go early the following morning to Hoxley-lane. But her visit was too late, by exactly twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER IV.

A tête-à-tête walk—Lively if not instructive conversation—
The rich visiting the poor—Misplaced confidence—Inno-
cent sin.

THE fashionable and luxurious Sir Matthew Dowling was not usually an early riser, but on the morning of the day which followed Martha's visit to Hoxley-lane, he almost out-did the lark. His attorney having been sent for from Ashleigh with all speed within an hour after he had received his daughter's report, all things regarding the procuring indentures had been made easy, and he found himself when he waked in the morning, in every sense, ready for action.

Great, and very awful is the power of wealth in a bad man's hands; for scarcely is there any barrier which the law can raise for the protection of those who have it not, sufficiently strong to save them, at all times and seasons, from the aggressions of those who have it.

How Mr. Canterbury, the attorney of Sir Matthew Dowling, contrived to get his part of the business executed so speedily, it would be difficult to say; but certain it is, that considerably before the knight's usual hour of breakfast on the following morning, this active friend and agent arrived at the lodge with documents, which only wanted the signature of the parties concerned to render them of sufficient power to bind little Michael during the next eleven years of his life, as apprenticed to Mr. Elgood Sharpton, *for the purpose of learning the business of a stocking-weaver.*

The name of Deep Valley, by which Mr. Elgood Sharpton's factory was universally known, was not mentioned, but instead of this he was described as Elgood Sharpton, Esq., of Thistledown House, Derbyshire, a designation most satisfactorily proving his honourable station, and, of course, his high respectability.

Sir Matthew perused the document, smiled, nodded his approval, replaced the red tape with which it had been tied, and lodged it in his coat-pocket, saying kindly to the judicious attorney as he did so, "Canterbury! we must get you made coroner at the next vacancy—or if we miss that, something or other else

that may suit you, my good fellow. You deserve to be taken care of, and you shall."

Mr. Canterbury expressed his gratitude and departed; whereupon Martha was again summoned to the presence of her father.

"What a capital good girl you are, Martha," said the knight, affectionately patting her cheek, "always up and about before any of the rest are out of their beds—I tell you what, Martha, you and I will have our breakfast comfortably together without waiting for any of them, and then I will walk down with you myself to see Michael's mother, and settle with her about the little fellow's destination."

Proud and happy was Martha made by this invitation, and gaily did she sally forth, when the cheerful meal was ended, for the rare pleasure of a tête-à-tête walk with the great man. Nothing could exceed Sir Matthew's good humour; he chatted, and joked, and talked of taking them all on a trip to Paris, and in short was hardly silent for a single moment. But amidst all this communicative confidential gossip, he never said a word more concerning the business they were upon.

Once or twice Martha began to say something intended to preface an inquiry as to the

local destination of Michael, but some lively sally from her father always turned the conversation into another channel, till at length they entered the gloomy region of Hoxley-lane; after which, neither of them spoke again till Martha said,—“ This is the house, papa. But I believe we had better go in the back way. Shall I step in first, and say that you are coming?”

“ No, no, my dear, there is no occasion to be so ceremonious, we will go in together.”

Martha then lifted the latch, and they did go in together, causing the sick woman to start as if she had seen a spectre. It was nearly three years since Mrs. Armstrong had last found herself in the overpowering presence of Sir Matthew Dowling; and the belief that this visit was for the express purpose of receiving her thanks, increased the embarrassment so startling a condescension was calculated to produce.

Martha saw her colour change from pale to red, and then to pale again, and gently approaching her, said,—“ Mrs. Armstrong, my father, Sir Matthew Dowling, is come himself to talk with you about little Michael.”

“ It is very—condescending, miss,” mur-

mured the poor woman, "and I'm very grateful for this and all favours."

"Very good, very good," said the knight, in return—not, however, looking very steadily in her face. "This young lady, who, I suppose you know, is Miss Martha Dowling, my daughter, paid you a visit yesterday, I believe, and spoke to you, did she not, about your little boy?"

"Yes, sir," was the concise reply.

"And you approved, she tells me, of his being put to a good trade?"

"In course, sir, I can't but approve, and be thankful for his being put in the way to help himself, and his poor crippled brother, too, when I am gone; but, I hope no offence, sir, I'd be right glad to know your honour's pleasure as to the place where he is to be."

"And that is a little more than I can tell you, my good woman," replied Sir Matthew, in a friendly, familiar tone. "I can tell you where his master that is to be lives. That," he continued, drawing the indentures out of his pocket, "that we shall find written down here: but he is one of the first in his line, and a capital trade it is, I promise you; so that he has got work-shops, I believe, in half-a-dozen places. However, I'll make it my business to

learn whereabouts Michael is to be, and let you know."

As he said this, Sir Matthew opened the instrument, and busied himself in unscrewing the top of his neat little portable ink-bottle.

"Then if it is all the same to you, sir," replied the widow Armstrong, in rather an unsteady voice, "I should like well to know where it would be, before I put my hand to the binding him."

Martha looked up, more than half afraid that such cautious acceptance of the important service offered might offend her hot-tempered father; but, equally to her surprise and satisfaction, she perceived that his countenance, instead of expressing anything of the kind, wore a look of more than usual good-humour, as he replied, beginning, at the same time, to replace the red tape round the papers, "That shall be just as it pleases you, my good woman; we won't say anything more about it just yet." Then, turning to Martha, he said, in a sort of half-whisper, "I can't stay now, Martha: we must go, dear, because I expect to find some one waiting for me at home. But we must not deceive the poor dear woman either. She ought to know, Martha, that this is a chance I may not have again, God knows when, if

ever. Can't you explain to her, my dear, that this is a sort of thing that by no means happens every day? Some time ago I had an opportunity of doing this gentleman a good turn about one of his principal hands for whom he was greatly interested,—for he is like a father to them all, and he promised then to return it whenever I had anything of the same sort at heart. So now, I have written to him about this boy, and he has answered me as kind as possible; only he tells me that he has got such quantities of applications from the people round him, that when he has a vacancy among the bound hands, he can't keep it open, and that he must have yes or no at once. I am afraid, therefore, that we must give it up, my dear."

This was "soft sorder," as the inimitable Slick calls it; and the poor doubting, trembling, helpless bit of human nature, lying on the bed from whence she knew full well she should never rise, did not listen to it unmoved. She felt, as he intended she should, her heavy responsibility, and looked up into the face of Martha in a manner that very speakingly asked for counsel.

The good girl understood the appeal, and frankly answered it. "You hear what my

father says, Mrs. Armstrong," said she, leaning over the poor invalid.

"Yes, miss, I do," replied the anxious woman, "and, God help me!—I feel as weak and ignorant as a baby about what I ought to say in return."

"I don't know how that can be," said the innocent Martha a little reproachfully. "You know exactly how the case stands, and must certainly be able to judge what you think it right to do under these circumstances."

"I hope excuse, miss, if I seem over motherly and foolish about him," replied the poor widow in a deprecating tone; "but he's a precious boy to me, and the binding him comes upon me unawares like."

"Well, then, there's nothing more to be said, I think," said Martha, withdrawing herself from the bed. "It seems a matter of feeling, papa, and I don't think we ought to battle against it, for it is very likely she would be unhappy if we persuaded her, let it turn out as it would."

Instead of answering, Sir Matthew suddenly wheeled round, and looked out of the window, as if the bit of stony mould extending ten feet deep to the ditch that fenced it contained something of peculiar interest and curiosity.

During this interval, which lasted about a minute, the widow Armstrong again fixed her eyes upon the face of Martha, with an appealing look that seemed to implore assistance from her judgment, while it evidently expressed confidence in her kindness. When Sir Matthew again permitted his countenance to be visible to them, it expressed nothing but indifference; but Martha thought it was such an easy good-natured sort of indifference, that there could be no danger in bringing him back to the subject, even though he said as he turned round, "Come, my dear Martha, I cannot stay another moment, I do assure you."

"I am quite ready, papa," she replied; "but don't you think it is almost a pity to let such an opportunity be lost for poor Michael?"

"Certainly it is, my dear," he replied in the most good-humoured accent imaginable. "But what would you have me do, my dear child? Depend upon it there is no real charity in assisting people against their will, or in a manner in any way contrary to their inclinations. You know perfectly well that it was my real and sincere wish that this good woman's

child should be well provided for. An opportunity for doing this, better far than I could have hoped for, is now proposed, but evidently does not meet her wishes. Unfortunately I must send the answer by to-day's post, and surely you would not recommend me to accept this situation for the boy, excellent as it is, against his mother's will?"

"No, papa—only it seems to me that Mrs. Armstrong has not quite made up her mind about it; and I thought perhaps that a few minutes' consideration might enable her to perceive how great a loss it would be to Michael were she to refuse it."

"Well, Martha!" returned the knight with a sort of jocose sigh, and at the same time seating himself on one of the widow's treasured rush-bottomed chairs, "I would rather make the person I expect wait at Dowling Lodge for an hour, than either disappoint your kind heart, or hurry this good woman into saying any thing that she does not really mean. What does the little fellow himself say about it?"

"He's grateful and thankful, sir, for what is offered to him, and willing he is to accept it.—'Tis only my poor weak sick heart that

has got no courage left in it. You think, miss, he had better take it?" she added, turning her anxious eyes upon Martha.

For a moment Martha felt a repugnance to the taking upon herself, as it were, the responsibility of the transaction, but an exclamation from her father settled the business at once.

"Poor soul!" said he. "How natural is this weakness! Give her, by your advice, the strength she wants, Martha—it is the most valuable gift you can bestow!"

"Indeed papa is very right, Mrs. Armstrong," said Martha cheerfully. "Michael will never forgive me if I let you throw away this golden opportunity."

"And I am sure I should never forgive myself if I threw away for him anything that you could call so, my dear young lady. I know full well all you have done for him, and been to him, and to doubt your judgment would be a sin indeed. So, if you please, miss, I am quite ready to sign."

Had Sir Matthew Dowling wanted any strengthening of the motives which actuated the deed he was about to perpetrate, he would have found it in this speech. The phrase, "I know what you have been to him," requiring no very forced interpretation, in order to sug-

gest to him that it was probable she knew what he had been to him also. However, he felt no inclination to disturb the business which was proceeding so satisfactorily, and therefore again smiled very kindly as he said, "I am sure nobody can find fault with your conduct in this business, Mrs. Armstrong. It has been exactly what it ought to be, and the better I think of you, the more anxious I feel to ensure this excellent situation for your boy. But, stay a moment: I came down here in such a hurry, that I forgot the necessity of having a witness. Wait here for a moment, Martha, and I dare say I shall find some of Mrs. Armstrong's neighbours who may not only be able to witness these indentures, but also to give her their opinion upon the advantage of them."

So saying the knight arose, and walked out of the room; but, before an anxious inquiry from the poor woman about the possibility of writing to her boy could be answered by Martha he returned again, followed by Parsons and another overlooker from one of his own factories, whom he found *accidentally* close to the premises.

"Here is a bit of good luck for us, Martha," said Sir Matthew, as he entered: "I should have been sadly put to it for time, if I had had

to run about till I could find a man who knew how to write his name. I have asked two fellows already, but they both said 'No.'—There is one comfort for you, at any rate, Mrs. Armstrong, your boy will never be in such a state of ignorance as that."

Sir Matthew, as he spoke, again untied the paper, and dipping a pen which had been stuck within his coat sleeve into the ink-bottle, he gave both pen and paper into the hands of Martha, saying, "There, dear, you will hold it for her better than I shall—only make haste!—I hate to break an appointment."

Martha received the paper, and without a moment's delay laid it before the pale and trembling woman, placing at the same time the pen in her right hand, and indicating with her own finger the place, to which Sir Matthew had pointed, as that where her signature should be.

The poor woman received both submissively; and after a moment's pause, looked up once more into the face of Martha, who was bending over her. A kind and encouraging smile sat upon her plain but expressive features, and without further hesitation the widow Armstrong signed her name.

"Here, Parsons, sign away!" said Sir Matthew, gaily, as he withdrew the document from the bed. The ready servant obeyed, and his fellow-driver followed his example, without waiting for any further instructions.

"Now, then, Martha, let us be off!" cried the knight, moving towards the door as he pocketed the papers. But, stopping suddenly before he opened it, he said, "By the way, Parsons, as chance has brought you here, we may as well make use of you about getting a few necessaries for our little stocking-weaver. We must trust you to get whatever may be wanted. He may take the clothes he has worn at the lodge, for Sundays; but of course they would not be suitable for him to work in."

"Very well, Sir Matthew, I will see about it," replied the important overlooker.

"I must have no time lost, if you please," rejoined his master, rather sharply; "for Mr. Elgood Sharpton mentioned in his letter, that he should be having some of his people passing this way who might take charge of him; and I am sure I can't say when they may happen to call. So go directly into the town, Parsons, and buy whatever you think the boy may want. I dare say this will be very nearly

the last expense, Mrs. Armstrong," he added, "that I shall be put to for him, and I assure you that I shall pay it very willingly."

With these words he left the room; and Martha, pronouncing a short but kind farewell, followed him. Soon after she had overtaken him, and again passed her arm through his, she was startled by a violent burst of laughter; and, on looking back, perceived, at no great distance behind them, Parsons and his companion, taking their way over a stile, that led by a short cut to Brookford factory. It was from them the hearty laugh had proceeded.

CHAPTER V.

Miss Brotherton visits the widow Armstrong, and lays the foundation of a very lasting friendship—She then calls at Dowling Lodge, but fails of obtaining what she went for.

As soon as Miss Brotherton and Mrs. Tremlett had finished their breakfast on the morning after the interview with Sophy Drake in the drawing-room at Milford Park, they set off together on foot to visit the widow Armstrong in Hoxley-lane.

“Nothing can happen to us worse than our adventure in the carriage the day before yesterday,” observed the young lady: “you will confess, dear friend, will you not, that Sir Matthew’s walking into the carriage was more terrible than anything likely to befall us on the high-road without one?”

“Why, I suppose I must, my dear,” answered the old lady; “for, to tell you the truth, I don’t think you could look more put out if a constable were to come up and arrest you.”

"Decidedly not, Mrs. Tremlett; and listen to the birds, and sniff the sweet air, and then tell me if we are not wise to walk!"

The old woman confessed that she really did enjoy it, and on they went, with the gardener's boy for a guide, till, in less than an hour, they found themselves before the door of No. 12, in Hoxley-lane. Probably their little pioneer was not one of the widow's visitors, for the pass through the hedge, leading to the back-kitchen door, appeared unknown to him; and, in answer to Miss Brotherton's knock for admittance, the principal entrance to No. 12 was opened by the ragged mistress of the tenement.

"Does the widow Armstrong live here?" inquired Mary.

"Yes, ma'am," observed the woman gloomily; continuing, as she made way for the ladies to enter, "The widow Armstrong is a lucky woman—she has got but one child left to provide for, and yet the gentlefolks keeps coming to help her, but nobody thinks of me and my ten young ones."

The ready hand of Miss Brotherton was immediately in her purse. "That is a large family indeed, my good woman. Are they none of them old enough to help themselves?"

"The seven oldest have all been in the factory from a'most the time they could stand, ma'am," replied Mrs. Sykes; "and if they hadn't, they must have been dead and buried long ago for want of bread. But though they have worked, poor creturs, early and late, there's no more come of it, than that their bones be here instead of in the churchyard."

"But with so large a number, all receiving wages," said Miss Brotherton, gently, "I should have hoped that you might have found yourselves better off than you seem to be."

"And that's what we are told, ma'am, from year's end to year's end; and we must bear it, for there is no help. But 'tis a'most as bitter as the work that grinds us."

Neither the person nor manner of Mrs. Sykes were in any degree prepossessing; she was dirty, and in every way untidy in the extreme. She had on her feet the fragments of a pair of men's shoes, but no stockings, the rest of her clothing being barely sufficient to cover her. Her eye, voice, and complexion furnished strong indications of her being accustomed to take spirits; while her frightfully thin limbs gave her the appearance of being half-starved. In short, it was impossible to look at her without feeling that she was a degraded, as well as

a suffering being. Mary Brotherton did feel this, and her heart sunk within her as she thought of Sophy Drake, of her drunken father, and of all Mrs. Tremlett had told her respecting the vice, which, like a wide-spreading and hideous epidemic, seemed to ravage in all directions the miserable neighbourhood in which fate had placed her. She shuddered as she contemplated the wretched being that stood before her; and, till she had spoken the words given above, a deep feeling of the woman's unworthiness chilled the ready pity of her warm young heart. But both in these words themselves, and in the tone of quiet settled despair in which they were spoken, there was a frightful and mysterious allusion to some species of injustice and cruelty, under which accusation she seemed herself to be included.

The distaste and reprobation that were a moment before making hasty inroads upon her benevolence, seemed suddenly arrested as she listened; and she was about to repeat again the questions she had already so uselessly asked, as to whence this universal severity of judgment against the factory labourers arose; and wherefore, beyond all others submitted to the sentence which dooms human

beings to toil, these people should appear to loathe their employment, and execrate, as it should seem, the very means by which they lived. But ere her lips opened to demand the explanation to which she so eagerly desired to listen, a glance at the hard features of the wretched woman checked her. "It cannot be from such as these," thought she, "that truth and instruction can be reasonably looked for"—and as she silently gave her alms, and moved onwards towards the door which had been pointed to, as that of the widow Armstrong, something like a systematic project for making herself mistress of the knowledge she wanted, for the first time, suggested itself to her imagination.

Mrs. Sykes eyed the silver largesse, as it fell into her hand, with a glance that seemed to devour it, and the words of thanks she uttered were almost hysterical in their eager vehemence. After delaying a moment for the contemplation of this precious "drudge 'twixt man and man," she opened the door of communication, and Miss Brotherton and her friend passed into the dwelling-room of the widow Armstrong.

Contrary to custom, her lame boy, Edward, was sitting on the side of her bed, and when

Mary entered he was holding her hand, and gazing in her face with an expression of countenance which appeared to both the intruders to be the most piteous they had ever looked upon. The poor child was looking, too, most wretchedly ill, and the first idea which suggested itself was, that he felt himself to be dying.

Notwithstanding the extreme poverty of the widow Armstrong, there was an air of decency and decorum about her, that might in any situation have commanded respect; but, when contrasted with the appearance of her neighbour, seemed to indicate a claim to more observance than her visitors were showing by this sudden and uninvited entrance.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Armstrong," said Mary, gently, "for breaking in upon you so abruptly; and I fear our doing so may have startled your sick child. This little fellow is very ill, I fear?"

"It is long since he has known health, ma'am," replied the widow: "but it is not that which makes him look so white and trembling now. We have lost what was dearer to us both than all the world beside; and though I don't think as this one will ever look up again, I can't find a word in my heart to comfort him!"

"What, then, has happened to you?" said Mary, with much interest—"Nothing bad to your son Michael, I hope?"

"You know Michael, ma'am?" said the poor woman, anxiously.

"I have seen him at Sir Matthew Dowlings'" she replied.

"I wish you never had, ma'am!" rejoined the widow bitterly—"We were only starving before, but now we are worse than that."

"Do explain to me what you mean, Mrs. Armstrong," said Mary.

"I ought to do it, ma'am, for you speak kindly; and that's a claim poor folks can seldom withstand. But how can I tell you the matter, ma'am? I know nothing; and that's the reason why poor Edward and I are so miserable."

"But that is a bad way to get into, my good Mrs. Armstrong," said Mary, cheerfully. "Don't fret yourself about fancied evils, which perhaps do not exist. Little Edward here should know better than that."

The pale, broken-hearted boy looked at her with lack-lustre eyes, but said nothing.

"Are you uneasy because Michael has not been down to see you lately?" resumed Miss Brotherton.

"He never failed to come, ma'am, till he was carried away from us!" replied the widow, with a sob, that seemed the result of strength exhausted, and weakness that could struggle no longer.

"Carried away from you!" cried Mary, changing colour. "What do you mean, Mrs. Armstrong? Who has carried away Michael from you?"

"Sir Matthew Dowling, ma'am, has had him taken away," and another sob followed the words.

"Do not think I torment you thus from idle curiosity," pursued Mary, bending over her; "but I entreat you to explain to me fully what you mean. I am greatly interested for your little boy."

"I thank you for it, ma'am," returned the poor mother, mournfully; "but I can tell little that you, or any grand lady, the friend of Sir Matthew, would think to the purpose. Yet the parting with him without one blessing, or one kiss, is hard to bear, though we don't justly know that any harm's to come to him."

"I am no particular friend of Sir Matthew Dowling's," replied Mary, with an accent which perhaps spoke more than her words.

"Then I will tell you about Michael!" ex-

claimed the lame boy, coming round the bed to the place where she was standing, and looking into her face as if he thought he could read all her thoughts there. "You have seen poor Mike when he was living there, ma'am?"

"Yes, I have, my dear boy," she replied, gazing with deep feeling at his pale, but beautiful countenance; "I have seen him there more than once, Edward, and I am quite sure he was not happy, though he was dressed so fine."

"He was more unhappy ten times over," replied Edward, "than when he was as ragged as me."

"Was he unkindly treated?" demanded Mary.

"He was beaten, kicked, and spit upon!" cried Edward, bursting into tears; "and then he was told to laugh, and look merry."

"A wretched, wretched sort of cruelty," she replied, "of which I can well believe Sir Matthew capable. But you surely do not suppose that he has run away from it without telling you or his mother that he had such an intention?"

"If you knew Mike better, ma'am, you wouldn't think that he could do such wicked-

ness," said the mother. "He has stood beating with strap and stick for years, ma'am, young as he is; and never asked to stop from the mill a day, though he has been bruised almost to a jelly;—and worse than that, too, poor lamb! a hundred fold, with such a heart as his, he has seen his lame brother there, that was always dearer, a great deal, to him than himself—he has seen the cruel stripes fall on his poor shoulders, too; and though he has come home with his little face washed with tears from it, he didn't think of running away."

Mary saw that she had given pain, and hastened to atone for it by expressing her sorrow for supposing such a thing possible; and then repeated her request, that she might be told what it was that had happened.

The widow then related more succinctly than might have been expected all that had passed between herself, her boy, and Miss Martha Dowling, on the morning which followed the theatrical representation at Dowling Lodge. And before she proceeded further, Edward bore testimony to the spirited and courageous willingness with which his brother had adopted the proposed scheme. He had, it seemed, as usual, watched Teddy's return from the factory—told him what Sir Matthew

proposed doing for him, and declared, that, hard as it would be to part with him and "mother," he was ready and willing to start, and was quite determined to be the best boy that ever was 'prenticed, and to be workman enough to maintain them both as soon as his time was out.

Here the widow again resumed her narrative, and related very accurately the scene of the following morning; dwelling much on the young lady's kind manner, and on her own putting it to her whether she advised that the child should go, or not.

"And Martha Dowling counselled you to let him go?" demanded Miss Brotherton.

"Yes, again and again she did," replied the poor mother.

"You are quite sure it was Miss Martha?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am; my Mike took care to make me understand that, the day they came together."

"Then be quite easy in your mind, Mrs. Armstrong," said Mary, eagerly. "I have no great liking for Sir Matthew Dowling. I do not think well of him, nor have I much to say in favour of any of his family. They seem to me to be cold-hearted, selfish people. But for this one, this Miss Martha that you speak

of, I will undertake to answer for it that she has never deceived you, and that if she advised you to let Michael go, it was because she thought the doing so would be advantageous to him."

"Bless you for ever and for ever, ma'am!" cried Mrs. Armstrong, seizing the hand of Mary, and pressing it to her lips. "There is truth, ma'am, in your voice, and in your eyes. Do as I do, Edward, dear! Look at the kind face of this young lady, and see if you can't find comfort from what she says? I did think, myself, ignorant as I am, that the young lady had an honest face. But, oh! ma'am, let it be as it will, and make the very best of it, 'tis cruel to have our darling taken away in this fashion, without one word of take-leave and blessing!"

"Indeed it is!" replied Mary; "and your being ignorant of the place of his destination increases this anxiety. But on this point, at least, I think I shall be able to set your mind at rest. Before this time to-morrow, I will take care to see some part of the family at the Lodge, and shall certainly not scruple to inquire every particular respecting your boy. Keep up your spirits, therefore, both of you; and, for the future, let this little fellow here look to me for his wages. I won't have him

go to the factory any more. What sum has he been receiving for his work?"

Astonishment very literally rendered the widow Armstrong dumb, on hearing this most extraordinary proposal. Poor soul! a few short days ago it would have been sufficient to make her forget her weakness and her want, and have put her in a state of mind that queens might envy: for she would hardly have been able to remember that it was possible to have another wish; but now the first use she made on recovering her speech, was to exclaim, "Oh, Michael! Michael! why beant you by to hear this?"

"He shall hear, Mrs. Armstrong," said Mary, in a voice of such cheerful confidence, that the terrors of both mother and son seemed to vanish before it. Mrs. Tremlett, too, ventured to add an encouraging commentary upon Mary's promised visit of inquiry at the Lodge, observing, that it was altogether out of probability that they should want to make any mystery as to where the little fellow was gone.

Mrs. Armstrong, as she listened, seemed almost too happy to credit the evidence of her own senses; but in the deep-set melancholy eye of Edward there was still an expression of suffering and of fear, that looked as if misery

had taken a hold upon him that could not be relinquished.

"Now I must go," said the young lady, rising, "or I shall hardly have time to keep my promise. But I must settle with you first, my dear boy. What was the amount of your wages by the month?"

"Six shillings, ma'am," replied Edward, looking at her, as she drew out her purse, with an eye that seemed to doubt what it beheld. "Six shillings!" cried Miss Brotherton, as she put the pitiful wages of a long month's agony into the little trembling hand. "And have you lost your health and liberty for this?" Tears started to her eyes, as she contemplated the look of wonder and delight expressed by the countenance of the poor widow; yet that look was not turned upon her. Stretching out her arms to the boy, she caught him to her bosom, and held him there, much as if she had suddenly beheld him snatched from the fangs of some devouring monster. The face of the child himself she could not see, but his whole frame trembled, and they fancied he was shedding tears.

"God bless you both!" she said, "to-morrow you shall see me again." And so saying she took the arm of her friend, and again passed

through the dwelling-room of Mrs. Sykes. The woman had now three little dirty creatures round her, to whom she was giving bread.

"Heaven keep you, ma'am! This is your treat!" she said, as Mary and her friend passed through. "It is the first time for many a week that I have fed 'em so freely, poor creturs."

Miss Brotherton's heart was too full to answer—she nodded her head and passed on. Their homeward walk, up Hoxley-lane, across the London-road, and along a pretty shaded bridle-road that led to a gate in her own park-paling, was performed almost entirely in silence. There is a state of mind in which ideas come with too much violence and rapidity to be told off in words. When this happens from an excess of happy imaginings, no condition can be more delightful: but when, as in the present case, it arises from the remembrance of painful realities, it is greatly the reverse. The misery around her was no longer a matter of doubtful speculation, but of most frightful certainty. Neither was it any vice in little Edward Armstrong, which drove him to offer up his sickly suffering frame to ceaseless labour at the rate of threepence for each long, painful day. She felt oppressed, overwhelmed,

and almost hopeless. Yet, at that time Mary Brotherton knew not, guessed not, dreamed not, of the hundredth part of what the unhappy class who had thus roused her human sympathies were daily and hourly suffering around her.

The first words she spoke on entering her house were to order her carriage, and having gone so far in the performance of the task she had undertaken, she turned with tender kindness to her old friend, and gave as much care to her comfort and refreshment, as if the relative situation which they had borne to each other in days of yore was just reversed, and that Mary was the nurse, and Mrs. Tremlett the nursling.

"You shall do nothing more before dinner, my dear good soul, but lie down upon the sofa, and get cool. Not even Mrs. Gabberly, I suppose, could see any thing particularly dangerous and improper in my going alone to pay a visit to Martha Dowling."

And alone to Dowling Lodge the heiress went, pretty steadfastly determined not to leave it, till she had learnt exactly at what point of the earth's surface Michael Armstrong might be found.

She inquired for Martha, and was shown as

usual into my lady's morning drawing-room, where to her extreme annoyance she found her ladyship, Sir Matthew, Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, and Miss Mogg.

If Lady Dowling could have been glad to see any pretty young lady, it would have been Miss Brotherton, and she did exert herself, more than usual, to be civil; while, on the contrary, Sir Matthew both felt and evinced considerably less satisfaction at the sight of her, than he had ever done since the fact of her heiress-ship had become matter of unquestionable notoriety to the whole neighbourhood. But if his reception was cold, that of Lady Clarissa was warm, for she actually threw her arms round the young lady, reproaching her at the same time very tenderly for not having sent to say she was going to drive to Dowling Lodge. "I should have liked your carriage, my dear, so much better than my broiling little phaeton!"

It was hardly possible, at that moment, that either one of the four persons present could have said any thing to her sufficiently interesting to fully awaken her sense of hearing; unless, indeed, Sir Matthew had led the conversation to Michael Armstrong. But this he did not do; and, therefore, having endured

Lady Clarissa's embrace, and answered her mechanically, she knew not what, Miss Brotherton walked up to the sofa where the lady of the mansion as usual sat enthroned, and said, "Will you be so good, ma'am, as to let Miss Martha be told that I am come to call upon her?"

The surprised eyebrows with which her ladyship listened to this speech would, probably, under other circumstances, have given birth to an exceedingly comical caricature; but at this moment Mary Brotherton had no fun in her thoughts, and not immediately receiving an answer, she said, loud enough for Sir Matthew to hear, "Will you give me leave to ring the bell, and ask for the pleasure of seeing Miss Martha?"

Lady Dowling still remained silently staring at her; but not so Sir Matthew. He reached the bell almost as soon as the young lady herself, and fully persuaded that this most unaccountable request could only proceed from some little manœuvring project at that moment labouring in the fair Brotherton's head, which had, somehow or other, his son Augustus for its object, his countenance resumed all its former affectionate urbanity towards her; and taking her hand too suddenly for any con-

trivance to prevent it, he said—"Martha? . . . Do you want to see Martha, my dear?—To be sure you shall. She is a Dowling, Miss Brotherton, though not quite like the rest of us. But where is the Dowling, young or old, male or female, who would not fly from the farthest corner of the world to see you?"

"I only want to see Miss Martha just now, sir," replied Mary, half smiling.

"And Martha you shall see, my dear, without a moment's delay. Desire Miss Martha Dowling to come here instantly!" he continued, as the door opened, and a servant appeared at it—adding, when the door closed again, "You do her an honour, my dear Miss Brotherton; in thus asking for her, that more than one of her family, perhaps, might feel inclined to envy." But as Miss Brotherton made no answer at all, and Lady Clarissa began to hem, and fidget, and walk towards the window, all which the observant knight well knew were pretty lures meant to recall him, he contented himself with gallantly drawing forward an arm-chair for the heiress, at no great distance from Lady Dowling, and then strode across the apartment, to soothe the irritation of his noble friend.

Martha never suffered a summons from her

father to remain a moment unanswered. The message had been delivered to her in his name, and she entered almost immediately. Miss Brotherton, who was in no humour to make small talk for her ladyship, instantly rose, and went forward to meet her. "I took the liberty of sending for you, my dear Miss Martha," she said, "to request you would let me speak to you alone, for five minutes. Will you take a parasol, and let us walk into the shrubbery together?"

Martha, who certainly liked Miss Brotherton, notwithstanding the late painful scene, produced by her indiscretion, and who, moreover, at this moment, joyfully recollected how charming an anecdote she had now to relate concerning her father, acquiesced in this proposal with a ready smile, and saying that her parasol was always in the hall, the two young ladies left the room together.

No sooner did she find herself beneath the sheltering trees of the extensive shrubbery, and ascertained, by looking round, that they were really alone, than Miss Brotherton, passing her arm through that of her companion, said, "My dear Miss Martha, I cannot help feeling great interest in the welfare of the little boy whom we saw performing the other

night—little Michael Armstrong, I mean. Will you have the kindness to tell me where he is now?"

Instead of giving a direct answer, Martha eagerly exclaimed, "I am so glad, Miss Brotherton, that you asked to see me, for I have quite longed to tell you all particulars about that little fellow, and all that papa has been doing for him. I do assure you, Miss Brotherton, that, notwithstanding what you saw the other night, papa has been, and still is, most excessively kind to him. Only he was very troublesome about the acting, and papa's temper is hasty. *That*, as you must be aware, Miss Brotherton, is the case with many people; but there are very few who have courage and candour to own it, as my father does. In justice to him, I must tell you what happened the morning after the unfortunate play. My father sent for me, and said that he was perfectly miserable in his mind on account of the anger he had shown towards Michael. He told me, as frankly as possible, that he had beat him, and that, in consequence of this, the boy was evidently so afraid of him that he had no enjoyment when in his presence. And he went on to say that, such being the case, he was determined to apprentice the

child to a good trade, where he might learn to maintain himself comfortably, and assist his family besides. So you see, Miss Brotherton," concluded Martha, in an eager voice, and with heightened colour, "you see that, if papa loses his temper, he knows how to atone for it."

Miss Brotherton listened to this statement with the most unbroken attention; and had she not been previously aware of the kind and excellent nature of Martha Dowling, she would have become so then. Her hopes, too, that all was fair and right concerning the disposal of the little boy were strengthened; and in full confidence of receiving a satisfactory answer, she said, "I am very much obliged to you, Martha, for telling me all this, because I truly feel an interest in the little fellow. And now I hope you will tell me also to what part of the country he has been sent."

"I would tell you in a moment, if I knew, my dear Miss Brotherton, but I do not. His departure at last was very sudden; owing, I believe, to papa's having found some particularly good opportunity of sending him."

"I wonder you should never have asked where he was sent to, Miss Martha!" said Mary, gravely.

"I did ask, Miss Brotherton," replied Martha; "but papa said he could not recollect the name of the place."

Mary changed colour, as she remembered the promise she had given to the child's mother; but after a moment's reflection, said, "Perhaps he may have recollected it since, my dear? I wish you would run in and ask him to come to me for a moment."

Martha seemed to hesitate. "I am sure," said she, after a little hesitation, "that papa would be delighted to come here to talk with you, Miss Brotherton—only Lady Clarissa might——"

"Nay, then, I'll go to him myself," said Mary, rather abruptly. "There is no particular objection, I suppose, to Lady Clarissa's being let into the secret of little Michael's abode." And immediately turning her steps towards the house, she re-entered the drawing-room, followed by Martha.

They found Sir Matthew engaged in exhibiting a portfolio of splendid engravings to her ladyship, who was descanting upon them with rapture; though the application of a near-sighted glass to one long-sighted eye, while the other was effectually closed, rendered them pretty nearly invisible to her.

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Sir Matthew," said the heiress, placing herself at the opposite side of the loo-table, and thereby commanding a perfect view of his countenance; "but you are too goodnatured, I am sure, to be angry with me, even though I do interrupt you. Will you have the kindness to tell me, sir, while Lady Clarissa is lost in admiration of that enchanting Venus, where little Michael Armstrong has been sent to?"

The question was too unexpected for even Sir Matthew's sturdy self-possession, to receive it as he would have wished to do. His bold eye, which had been gaily fixed on the young lady, as she spoke to him, fell before her keen, inquiring glance, and he turned the page of Lady Clarissa's adoration with rather unseemly rapidity as he replied, "To a tradesman—that is, to a manufacturer, some miles farther north, Miss Brotherton. I have just been telling Lady Clarissa," continued the knight, recovering his audacity, "I have just been telling her all the little fellow's adventures. The love of novelty seemed to have superseded all other love in his young heart, for he was delighted to go."

"But he could not have liked going without taking leave of his mother and brother, Sir

Matthew. I have just seen them, and they are in a perfect agony about him—in fact, I am come here on purpose to ask where he has been sent.”

“Fairest of messengers!” exclaimed the knight, with a tender smile, “how utterly miserable shall I be if I cannot answer you! —I think it is to Halifax, I am almost sure that it is either to Halifax or Wakefield that he is gone.”

“You have bound the little fellow apprentice, you do not know where?” said Miss Brotherton, with undisguised astonishment.

“I do not say that, my dear young lady. I know he is apprenticed to an excellent good man, who is a stocking-weaver; but he has two or three large concerns belonging to him, and I protest to you that at this moment I really cannot say to which this little fellow has been sent.”

“I am quite shocked to give you so much trouble, Sir Matthew,” returned Mary, “but I should be exceedingly obliged if you would learn the name of the place, and let me know it. I ventured, sir, to promise the boy’s mother that I would learn this for her, and I am quite sure that you will not let me disappoint her.”

"Most assuredly not! I will call or send to-morrow at the latest, my charming Miss Brotherton! How I adore your benevolence! No wonder you are such friends, Lady Clarissa! Your hearts are made upon the same model!"

To this satisfactory assurance Miss Brotherton made no answer; but telling Sir Matthew that she should remain at home on the morrow for the purpose of receiving his promised information, took her leave.

With increased dislike of Sir Matthew, perhaps, yet with no very serious fears about the fate of little Michael, Miss Brotherton boldly determined to brave all the wonder which the act might occasion, and ordered her carriage to stop at No. 12, Hoxley-lane, Ashleigh.

As it happened, however, she escaped all her military admirers, and reached the widow Armstrong without interruption; the absorbing mills were in full activity, and few of the inhabitants of the miserable region through which she passed were left to gaze on the unwonted spectacle. The answer she brought was received by the widow and her boy with breathless attention; but it was quite evident that it did not altogether remove the sort of vague terror which seemed to have taken

possession of them. Mary's cheerful assurance, however, that she should soon bring them more satisfactory intelligence, could not be listened to without good effect; and she left them at last, so infinitely happier than she had found them, that, spite of Sir Matthew's unsatisfactory reply, and more unsatisfactory manner, she still blessed her morning's work.

CHAPTER VI.

A journey, begun in very good style, but ending not quite so well—A faithful description of a Valley in Derbyshire—Michael makes some new acquaintance.

AND where was little Michael? The indentures, when duly signed and executed, did not remain two hours in Sir Matthew Dowling's possession before he began to put in action the power they gave him. Mr. Joseph Parsons perfectly understood the nature of the "*few necessities*" which he was commanded to procure for the young stocking-weaver; and accordingly, by the time Sir Matthew had taken leave of Martha in the hall, after their walk back from Hoxley-lane, his confidential agent was ready to attend him in his study.

"Now, Mr. Parsons, I flatter myself that you will allow I have managed this business tolerably well. My excellent friend, Elgood

Sharpton, will owe me a good turn—for, thanks to the meddling of old Sir Robert, 'prentice-boys are not so easily got as they used to be—and you and I, Mr. Parsons, have got rid of a most infernal spy. Now, then, to business. How soon can you set off with him?"

"As soon as a horse can be harnessed to the jockey-cart, Sir Matthew."

"The jockey-cart?—the devil! What a fool you are, Parsons! Have you really no more wit in you than to propose setting off willy-nilly, with this young cur, that yelped at the rate he did the other night, before all the fine folks in the county, in an open jockey-cart? Fie, Mr. Parsons, fie!—I really had a better opinion of your understanding."

"I thought he was going to set off, at any rate, by his own free will, Sir Matthew," replied the superintendent, "and I knew when we got among the moors, it wouldn't much matter to me, if he did sing out."

"You are an excellent fellow, Parsons—true to the backbone, and as firm as a rock: but don't you ever undertake to carry through such a pretty little kidnapping scheme as this, where every thing is to be done according to law, unless you have got the help of a little

such stuff as this," and the knight touched his own forehead expressively as he spoke.

"There's few men as wouldn't be the better for a little of that, Sir Matthew," returned the judicious Parsons with a submissive nod; "but I'm ready and willing to do your bidding, be it what it may, and that's the best way of putting your honour's wit to profit."

"You are right there, my good fellow—one captain is always better than two. But, however, as to master Michael, Parsons, we must neither let him stay loitering here till his dainty mother has questioned all the gossips who will come to prate with her about her boy, and about all the nonsense current concerning Squire Elgood Sharpton's, of Thistledown House; nor yet must we carry him off at noonday in an open jockey-cart, without permitting him to kiss mother and brother, and uncle and aunt, and the devil knows who besides, from one end of Ashleigh to the other,—all ready, perhaps, to tell him some amusing anecdotes concerning his future master."

"But what be the indentures good for, Sir Matthew," shrewdly inquired Mr. Parsons, "if they don't give you power over the chap, let him hear what he will?"

“ Fair and softly, Mr. Parsons—there is a when and a where in all things. It has cost me some pounds, and a d—d deal of trouble to get up a cry hereabouts concerning my goodness and charity to these Armstrongs. Once get the boy off, and you and I, between us, can make folks talk as loud of the great preferment he has come to, as mother Armstrong can about her doubts and alarms. There is no fear of that—I have more than one friend who will swear a thing or two for me. But once get up a screaming bout at the widow’s, and a struggling scene in taking off the young gentleman, and we never shall hear the last of it. So, if you please, Mr. Parsons, we will just get the young gentleman to take a ride before he is an hour older. But not in a jockey-cart though. I believe you know the road and the baiting-place?—By Jove! Parsons, now I think of it, there would be no better joke than taking him in my own carriage for the first few miles, and letting you drive on, as far as Wood-end or thereabout, and wait till our coming. You know I have taken him out in the carriage lots of times, so he will think nothing of that; and I will have Crockley go with me to make the party agreeable. So off with you to Wood-

End as fast as you can go. But it must be in the covered cart remember ; and a trifle of cord must be in the way in case he gives trouble."

Within an hour from this time, Sir Matthew Dowling's carriage was proceeding at a dignified and leisurely pace along a cross-country road which led to a lane, which led to a moor, across which was a track, which led by another lane to Mr. Elgood Sharpton's factory in the desolate hollow, known by the name of "Deep Valley."

The party, as arranged by Sir Matthew, consisted of himself, his friend Dr. Crockley, and Michael Armstrong. The little fellow had been repeatedly honoured by a seat in the same stately vehicle before, for the purpose of being shown off at various houses in the neighbourhood, and had a notion that he was now taken out, in order to hear the remainder of his great fortune announced. That this final proof of Sir Matthew's benevolence should have for its object the sending him far away from Dowling Lodge would have been, but for the dreaded parting with his mother and brother, a source of unmixed joy to the little apprentice ; and, even with this drawback, the distant hopes of his young heart

might have been read in the contented meditation of his eye, as he rode silently along in front of his jocose companions, who amused themselves the while in talking very mystically concerning him, and his very useful and judicious destination.

At length the carriage reached the point at which Sir Matthew intended his airing should terminate, and he looked out to reconnoitre the opening of a lane to the left where he expected to see the covered cart. Nor was he disappointed; a covered cart, with an excellent stout horse in it, was drawn up close to the bank to take advantage of the shade of a thick elm-tree that grew upon it. As the carriage approached, the occupant of the humbler vehicle peeped out, and Sir Matthew recognized the punctual Parsons.

"Pull the check-string, Crockley," said the knight, "We will get out here. That is, you may if you will, there is no occasion, I suppose, for me to trouble myself, is there?"

"Oh! dear no," replied Dr. Crockley, cheerfully. "Here comes Parsons, good man and true. Get out, master Michael. Jump, jump, and enjoy it, my fine fellow! Perhaps you won't have much time for jumping when you begin learning your trade."

Without thinking it needful to reply to what he did not very clearly understand, Michael did as he was bid, and sprang from the carriage to the ground. The well-known figure of Parsons greeted him as his feet touched the turf, and the next instant he felt his hand suddenly seized by him.

"Shall you want me, Mr. Parsons?" said Dr. Crockley, putting his head out of the carriage.

"Not at all, sir," replied the superintendent, leading Michael forward. "Then shut the carriage-door, John," said Sir Matthew, "and order the coachman to drive home."

"Please, sir! Please, sir!—" uttered the plaintive voice of Michael, as he turned his head, and attempted to disengage his hand. "Please, sir, is Mr. Parsons to take me away?"

"Yes, my boy, he is," replied the knight, loud enough for the footman to hear. "He is going to take you to your new master, and you may give my compliments to him, my dear, and tell him that I have sent him a very good boy. Good bye!—Good bye!—Home!"

So ended the colloquy; the carriage turned round and drove off by the way it came, and Michael Armstrong was left alone with Mr.

Joseph Parsons. He need not, however, have held the little fellow's hand so tight, for there was no rebellion in his heart, nor any thought of escape in his head. He knew his companion too well to hope for any explanation from him respecting this sudden manner of sending him off, and, child as he was, he had no inclination to weep before him; but, on the contrary, his young heart swelled with a proud determination to behave well, and to set about his new employment with a stout spirit. Nevertheless, when he arrived at the cart he paused for a moment, before he obeyed the orders of Parsons to "climb up," and ventured to say, "Please, sir, beant I to see mother any more?"

"Climb up! I tell you," said the brute, clenching his fist at him, "and if you bother me with any more questions, I'll just give you this in your mouth to stop your jabbering."

Had Michael counted twenty years instead of ten, he could not more resolutely have screwed his spirit to endurance than he did as he now clambered up, and placed himself, as he was directed, in the back part of the vehicle. Not another syllable passed his lips. For four hours the slow but sure-footed cart-horse jogged on through a lane, that would have

made any pace beyond a walk intolerable. At the end of that time, the cart stopped before the door of a lonely public-house that formed a corner, round which the road turned off at nearly a right angle, and stretched across one of those wild and desolate moors which are, perhaps, only to be found in such perfection of dark and stony ruggedness in Derbyshire. Michael, as he descended from the cart, looked out upon the unlimited expanse of dreariness, and shuddered; but his mind had not been sufficiently filled with the remembrance of brighter objects, to give the scene as full effect upon him, as it might have produced on others.

The "Mucklestone Moor," haunted by the black dwarf, was a pleasant spot compared to it; for there the barren heath was only strewn with fragments of stones around one certain spot, whence rose, doubtless with some pretence to picturesque dignity, "a huge column of unhewn granite." But on the Ridgetop Moor of Derbyshire, no object reared itself above the rest, either to attract or relieve the eye. As far as sight could reach, the wild heath was encumbered with a crowded layer of large and shapeless grey stones, defying the air of heaven to nourish vegetation among

them, and making any effort of man to remove the congregated mass desperate and unavailing. Arid, rugged, desolate, was the desert that spread around; and to those who knew the nature of the operations carrying on in every direction near it, no great stretch of imagination would have been necessary to suggest the idea of fitness and sympathy between the district and the most influential portion of its population. This is, indeed, a fitness that seems often found. Where towering mountains scale the heavens the hardy natives show a spirit pure and clear as the sweet air by which they live. In the rich valleys of the East the lazy peasant eats his rice, purchased with easy labour, and is content to dream away his being in the sultry shade. And in the flinty region of our northern moors, the race of Millocrats batten, and grow fat, as if they were conscious of, and rejoiced in, the local sympathy.

A stunted elderly lad of all work came forth on hearing the rumbling of the wheels. "Ask the dame if she has got two beds in one room," said Mr. Parsons, descending from the driving-seat, of which he had had quite as much as he desired. The message brought out a hideous crone, whose sharp visage looked as if it had

drawn itself up into points and angles while battling with the rough blasts that roared, whistled, and moaned about her dwelling.

"And who be you?" was her first salutation. To which Mr. Parsons only nodded graciously in reply.

"Dear me! Be it you, sir?" exclaimed the woman. "I ax your pardon, for not knowing your honour at a glance. Beds? Ay, ay, plenty of beds, sir. Please to walk in. Who is this fine young'un? He can't have nothing to do with the mills, any way."

"This is a fine holiday suit, dame, that Sir Matthew has been pleased to bestow upon him," replied Mr. Parsons, "and if he had behaved himself a little better, he might have lived like a prince to the end of his days; but he is an untoward chap, and chose to cry when he should have laughed. And so, you see, the fine folks at the lodge got tired of him."

"What, then, this be the boy, be it, as we have had so many talking about? He was to be made a gentleman of by Sir Matthew Dowling? And so he is turned off, is he?"

This was said as the old woman led the way to the receiving-room, that is to say, the kitchen of the mansion, and here, though the season was still warm elsewhere, a large fire

was burning. That its warmth was welcome might be gathered from the fact, that the only persons in possession of the room were sitting or standing close beside it. The guests, before the arrival of the new comers, amounted only to three, namely, a young woman pacing her way to a distant service, a stout lad, her brother, who travelled with her, to carry her box and guard her from harm; and a venerable-looking man, with gray hair, but having withal bright eyes, and a florid skin, and bearing in his dress and demeanour the appearance of a thriving agriculturist.

It was with so bustling a movement that the landlady pushed back the little round table on which stood the farmer's mug of beer, and there was so much of respect in the manner with which she wiped the chair brought forward for Mr. Parsons, that the fact of his being a person of consequence became notorious to all. The farmer quietly pushed back his chair, to follow the table, the young woman modestly squeezed herself very closely into the chimney-corner, and her brother fairly bolted, standing with eyes and mouth widely opened, to gaze at ease upon the distinguished society into which it had been his chance to fall. Mr. Parsons took his place among them,

as such a great man ought to do. That is to say, he looked neither to the right nor to the left, but made himself comfortable without taking the trouble of considering whether any other person were present or not. Michael crept in after him, and when the more important part of the company had arranged themselves, he was observed standing alone in the most distant part of the room.

“What dost stand shivering there for, my boy?” said the old farmer, in north-country dialect, so broad as to be dangerous for south-country folks to spell, “I could be after thinking there was some mistake here. Surely you ought not to be standing, while some other folks are sitting.”

This observation, though the genuine result of the old man's notions of vulgar, and the reverse, might not have been so bluntly spoken had he not felt himself affronted by the uncereemonious style in which his place before the fire had been taken from him. Michael, probably, did not understand the full meaning of the remark, nevertheless he looked dreadfully terrified, and fixed his eyes upon the back part of Mr. Parsons's august head, his face being fortunately turned from him, with

an expression of desperate fear, that seemed to puzzle the good farmer.

"Well, now, don't he look like as well-behaved and pretty a young gentleman as one would wish to see?" continued the farmer, turning to the young girl. "And yet there's no mistaking that t'other's his master."

"Fine feathers makes fine birds, for them as can see no farther," cried Parsons contemptuously, and turning one of his threatening scowls upon the old man. "But wait a bit, Goodman Goose, and you'll find out, perhaps, as all is not gold as glitters."

"Poor little fellow!" exclaimed the farmer, on meeting the superintendent's ill-omened eye. "I wish, with all my heart, master, that nobody cared no more for your ugly looks than I do."

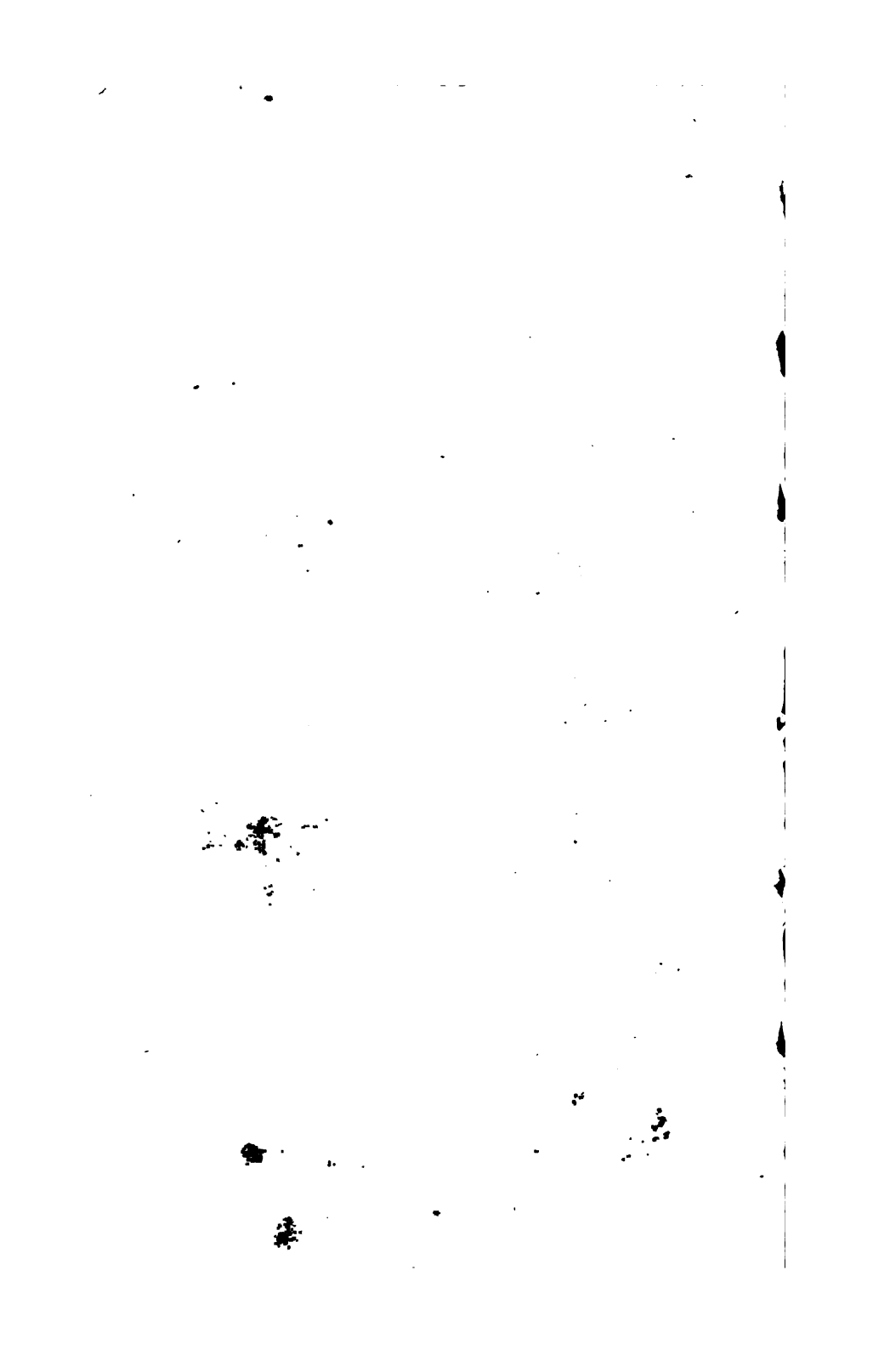
"Dame Pritchard," said Parsons, without appearing to hear him, "let the boy and me have a bit of supper, d'ye hear. Spite of his fine clothes, however, which were but a gift of charity, the boy is neither better nor worse than one of our factory children."

"I would not have thought it," said the old man, apparently satisfied, and turning to his mug.



J. Ruskyn del.

*"Fine feathers makes fine birds,
for them as can see no farther."*



"No, I dare say," retorted Parsons, with a sneer. "Such chaps as you seldom finds out what's what, or who's who, before they are told."

From this moment no further interest was expressed about little Michael. *He was a factory boy*, and what good was there in asking any further questions? So a thick slice of bread, and a scrap of bacon were set before him, and as soon as the more elaborate supper of Mr. Parsons was concluded, he, with great affability, took the little fellow by the hand, and, preceded by Dame Pritchard and a candle, conducted him to a pallet bed in the same chamber as his own.

For the first moment after he was left alone with the boy, the superintendent felt a strong inclination to make him pay for the affronts he had been the cause of his receiving below. But the same wisdom which had cut short his indignation there checked him now; and, having locked the chamber-door, and given Michael a stimulating kick to hasten his undressing, he carefully packed in a bundle the Dowling Lodge suit which he took off, leaving in its place, beside the bed, the result of his hasty shoppings at Ashleigh.

When roused from his slumbers at day-

break the following morning, Michael found these new garments ready for him, and for a moment his heart sunk at the change, for, though new, they were of the very lowest kind, and formed as strong a contrast as was well possible with the dress he had laid aside on preparing for his night's rest. But the human mind will often show symptoms of philosophy even at ten years old; which truth was made evident by the manner in which the young apprentice invested himself in his new suit, cheering his spirit, as he did so, with the recollection that a person going to be bound to a trade like that of stocking-weaving would look very ridiculous in such a dress as had been just taken away from him.

Early as it was, Mrs. Pritchard was ready in the kitchen with "a pot of hot tea" for Mr. Parsons; Michael received a fitting hunch of bread, the covered cart was brought up to the door, and the ill-matched pair set off again upon their journey.

It might seem paradoxical to say that the temper of Mr. Parsons was irritated by the patient, unsuspecting, and submissive demeanour of his helpless charge: yet such, nevertheless, was the fact. It was many years since the bones of Mr. Parsons had been ex-

posed to any conveyance more rough and rude than Sir Matthew's jockey cart, which was constructed with excellent and efficient springs; the movement, therefore, of the covered vehicle which had brought his aching joints to the "Crooked Billet," on Ridgetop Moor, was equally unwonted and disagreeable; and now that the peaceable demeanour of his little companion had convinced him that it was altogether unnecessary, he felt ready to twist his neck round as an atonement for all he had endured.

Ere they had advanced a mile farther, however, his spirit found a species of consolation that was perfectly congenial to it. The drear dark desert that spread before them, dimly visible as far as the eye could reach through the chilling mist of the morning, was just such a region as his heart desired for the dwelling of the young plague who had caused him so jolting a journey; and here, too, the covering of the rough machine was far from unwelcome, so that Mr. Parsons, as he drove slowly and cautiously onward amidst the deep ruts and rumbling stones, looked out upon the bleak desolation of the scene with a feeling that almost approached to complacency.

At length the moor was passed, and for a

few miles their joints enjoyed the luxury of a turnpike-road. The country, too, seemed softening into a species of wild beauty that might, in some degree, atone for its bleakness. But ere this had lasted for more than a couple of hours, the horse's head was again turned aside from the main road, and by a steep and very rough descent, they gradually approached the level of a stream, running through so very narrow a valley, as in many places to afford barely space enough for the road between the brook and the precipitate heights which shut it in.

On reaching this level, the road, which for the last quarter of a mile had seemed to be leading them into the little river itself, turned abruptly, and by an angle so acute, following the indented curve of the lofty hill, that they speedily appeared to be shut in on all sides by the towering hills that suddenly, and as if by magic, reared themselves in every direction round. It is hardly possible to conceive a spot more effectually hidden from the eyes of all men than this singular valley. Hundreds may pass their lives within a few miles of it without having the least idea that such a spot exists: for, from the form of the hills, it so happens that it is possible to wander for

hours over their summits without discovering it; one undulation rising beyond another, so as to blend together beneath the eye, leaving no opening by which this strip of water-level in their very centre can be discerned.*

For about another half mile, the narrow cart-road runs beside the stream without encountering any single object, except its lofty barrier and the brook itself, more remarkable than here and there a reed of higher growth than common, or a plant of foxglove, that by its gay blossom seems to mock the desolate sadness of the spot. Another turn, however, still following the wavy curvings of the mountain's base, for mountain there it seems to be, opens another view, and one that speaks to many senses at once the difference between the melancholy caused by nature, and that produced by the work of man. A wide-spreading cotton-factory here rears its unsightly form, and at one glance makes the happy wanderer, whose foot is free to turn which way he will, feel how precious is the power of re-

* The real name of this valley (which most assuredly is no creation of romance) is not given, lest an action for libel should be the consequence. The scenes which have passed there, and which the few following pages will describe, have been stated to the author on authority not to be impeached.

tracing his steps back again along the beguiling path that has led him to it.

This was a joy for which our little Michael sighed in vain. On jogged the cart, and nearer it came at every jolt to the object which he most hated to look upon. But then came also the cheering thought, that he was no longer a mere factory boy, but about to become an apprentice to a good and profitable trade, in which hereafter he might expect to get money enough for himself, for mother, and Teddy too! Nevertheless, he certainly did wish, at the bottom of his heart, that the stocking-weaving business was not carried on in a building so very like a cotton factory! But though Michael saw this hated cotton factory, he as yet saw but a small portion of the horrors which belonged to the spot he had reached. His position in the vehicle made it impossible for him to look round, and perceive how completely all the acts that might be committed in that *Deep Valley* were hid from the eye of every human being but those engaged in them. Neither could he recognize in the dismal building detached, yet connected both with the manager's house and the factory, the *Prison Prentice-house*, which served as

HOME to hundreds of little aching hearts, each one endowed by nature with light spirits, merry thoughts, and fond affections; but all of whom rose to their daily toil under circumstances which rendered enjoyment of any kind both morally and physically impossible.

The gradations by which all the misery that awaited him was disclosed were, however, neither lingering nor uncertain. The cart stopped, Parsons got out, and then calling forward his companion, seized him roughly by the arm, and swung him through the door which opened to receive them.

"Soh! This is the chap you are going to bestow upon us, is it, Mr. Parsons?" said a fellow, whose aspect must have withered hope in the gayest spirit that youth and joy ever produced between them. "Has he nimble fingers?"

"He can move 'em quick enough when he've got a mind for it," replied Parsons. "But you must not spare the strap, I can tell you, for a more obstinate, hard-skinned little devil never crossed the threshold of a factory."

"Never mind, Mr. Parsons, we know how to manage all those matters, you may depend upon it. We possess many advantages over

you, sir. No parents here, you know, to come bothering us about bones and bruises. Here they all count at what they are worth, and no more. Children is plenty, Mr. Parsons; and that's about the best thing we have got in our favour: for it can't be denied but we all of us, at times, finds that we have managed to complete more work than 'tis easy to dispose of."

"No doubt of that, Mr. Woodcomb. But you had better hand off the boy, if you please, and then we'll settle our little matter of business, and I'll be off. Your roads are none of the best, sir, and I must make my way back to the Crooked Billet to-night."

"Not till you have had a bit and a drop with us, Mr. Parsons. They are at supper in the Prentice-house now, and our young master shall be handed in at once."

So saying, the scowling manager opened a door in the farther corner of the room, and made Michael a sign that he was to pass through it. The child obeyed, but he trembled in every joint. Feelings of deeper terror than had ever reached his heart before were creeping over him. His lips moved not, but his very soul seemed to whisper within him "Mother! Mother!"

Yet at that moment the unhappy boy knew not what was before him: the influence under which he cowered thus was like that produced by the leaden dimness of a coming storm upon the birds, who droop their pinions and seem ready to fall to the earth, even before a single hailstone has touched them.

A long low passage led to another door, which was again opened by the condescending hand of Mr. Woodcomb; through this he thrust the poor Michael, and having either by a word or a sign made known to the governor of the Prentice-house, that he had brought an accession to his wretched crew, he retired, closing the door behind him.

Michael heard the door close, and looked up. The room he was in was so long as almost to appear like a gallery, and from one end to the other a narrow deal board stretched out, having room for about two hundred to sit down at once. The whole of this table was now occupied by a portion of the apprentice children, both boys and girls, belonging to Deep Valley Mill, and their appearance might have wrung the heart of any being who looked upon them, however blessedly wide his own destiny might lead him from the melancholy troop. But to Michael, the spectacle was ap-

palling; and, young as he was, he seemed to feel that the filthy, half-starved wretches before him were so many ghostly representations of what he was himself to be. A sickness like that of death came over him, and he would have given a limb, only for freedom to stretch himself down upon the floor and see no more. But the master of the ceremonies at this feast of misery bore a huge horsewhip in his hand, without which indeed, it is said, he seldom appeared on the premises, and with it an eye that seemed to have the power of quelling with a single glance the will of every little wretch it looked upon.

The place that Michael was to take at the board was indicated to him, and he sat down. The food placed before him consisted of a small bowl of what was denominated stir-pudding, a sort of miserable water-porridge, and a lump of oaten cake, of a flavour so sour and musty, that the little fellow, though never accustomed, till the fatal patronage of Sir Matthew fell upon him, to any viands more dainty than dry bread, could not at this first essay persuade himself to eat it. The wife of the governor of the Prentice-house, a helpmeet for him in every way, chanced to have her eye upon the stranger child as he pushed

the morsel from him, and the smile that relaxed her features might have told him something, had he chanced to see, and understand it, respecting the excellent chance there was of his having a better appetite in future.

A girl nearly of his own age sat on one side, and a boy considerably older on the other: the first, who had as much of beauty as it was, perhaps, possible for any human being to have after a six-months' residence at Deep-Valley Mill, looked up into his face with a pair of large blue eyes that spoke unbounded pity, and he heard a soft little voice whisper, "Poor boy!"—while his lanky neighbour on the other side made prize of the rejected food, venturing to say aloud, "Any how, it is too good to be wasted."

The wretched meal did not last long, and for a few minutes after it was ended the governor and his wife disappeared. During this interval, those who had strength and inclination moved about the room as they listed, but by far the greater number were already dropping to sleep, after a day of protracted labour, during which they had followed the ceaseless movements of the machinery for above fifteen hours. Among the former was the hungry lad who had appropriated the oat-cake of Michael;

and no sooner were the eye of the master and mistress removed, than he turned to the new-comer, and in a tone that seemed to hover between good-humour and ridicule, said, "So you could not find a stomach for your supper, my man?"

"I did not want supper," replied Michael, dolefully.

"You didn't want it, didn't you? That speaks better for the living as you have left, than I can speak of that as you'll find," returned his new acquaintance. "Don't you say nothing to nobody, and, to-morrow morning, after the lash have sounded through the room to wake us all, just you start up and jump into your clothes, and when we goes to pump, I'll show you where we gets our tit-bits from."

Michael was in the act of nodding assent to this proposal, when the woman, who five minutes before had left the room, returned to it, and by a very summary process caused the ragged, weary, prayerless, hopeless multitude to crawl and clamber, half sleeping and half waking, to their filthy beds. They were divided by fifties in a room, but notwithstanding the number, and the little space in which they had to stow themselves, the stillness of heavy sleep pervaded every chamber. ere the

miserable little inmates had been five minutes enclosed within the walls. Poor Michael lay as motionless as the rest, but he was not sleeping. Disappointment, fearful forebodings, and excessive nausea, all conspired to banish this only blessing that an apprenticed factory child can know.

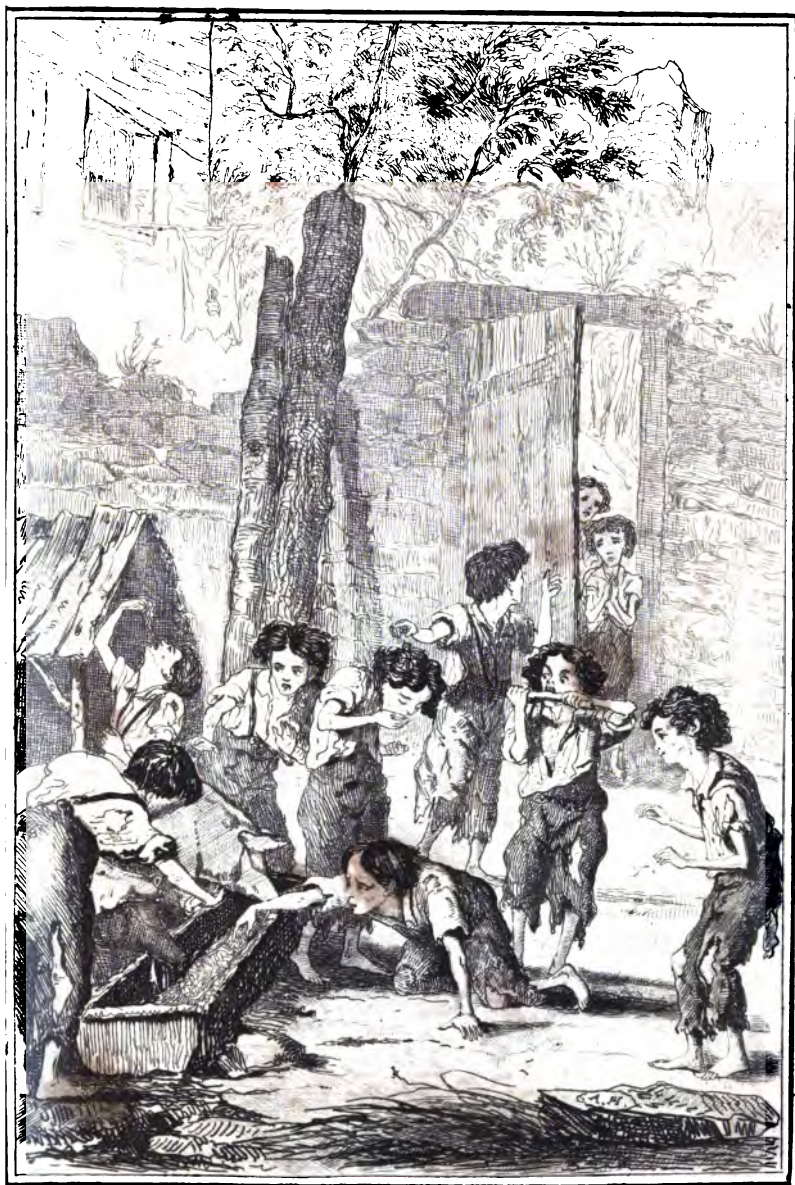
He had already laboured, poor fellow, for nearly half his little life, and that under most hard and unrelenting masters ; but till now, he had never known how very wretched his young thoughts could make him. His mother's fond caresses, and his brother's fervent love, had in spite of toil, and sometimes in spite of hunger, cheered and comforted the last moments of every day. The rude bed also, on which the brothers lay, was too clean, notwithstanding all the difficulty of keeping it so, to be tainted with the loathsome scent of oil, or sundry other abominations, which rendered the place where he now lay almost intolerable. Yet to this den, far, far away from the only creatures who loved and cherished him, he was come by his own consent, his own express desire ! The thought was almost too bitter to bear, and the bundle of straw that served him for a pillow received for the first hour of the night a ceaseless flood of tears.

It was, as his young companion had predicted, by the sound of a flourished whip that he was awakened on the following morning. In an instant he was on his feet, and a minute or two more sufficed to invest him in his clothes : this speed, however, was the effect of terror, for he remembered not the invitation of the preceding evening. But hardly had he finished the operation of dressing, when Charley Ford, the boy who gave it, was by his side, and giving him a silent hint by a wink of the left eye, and a movement of the right elbow that he might follow him, turned away, and ran down stairs.

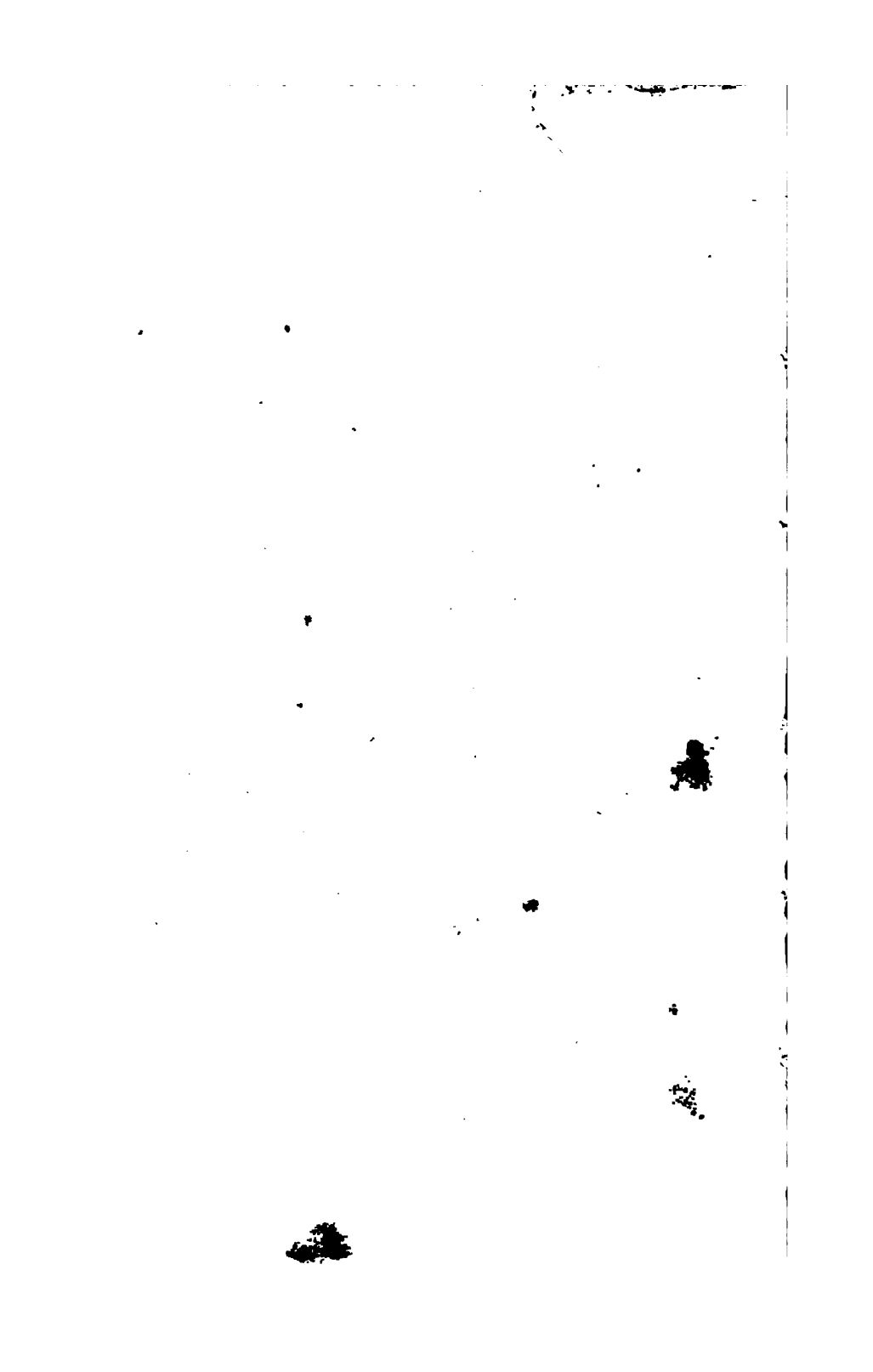
Michael did so too, and presently found himself, with a multitude of others in a small paved court, on one side of which was a pump, to whose spout every child came in succession to perform a very necessary, but, from lack of soap, a very imperfect act of ablution.

Neglecting to watch his turn for this, and not permitting Michael to do so either, Charley Ford made his way to a door that opened upon another part of the premises, and pushing it open, disclosed to the eyes of Michael a loathsome and a fearful spectacle.

Seven or eight boys had already made their way to the sort of rude farm-yard upon which



"Make haste young un' or they wunt



this door opened, one and all of whom were intent upon purloining from a filthy trough just replenished for the morning meal of two stout hogs, a variety of morsels which, as Michael's new acquaintance assured him, were "dainty eating for the starving prentices of Deep Valley mill."

"Make haste, young'un," cried Charles good-naturedly, "or they won't leave a turnip-paring for us." And on he rushed to the scuffle, leaving Michael gazing with disgust and horror at the contest between the fierce snouts of the angry pigs, and the active fingers of the wretched crew who contested with them for the offal thus cast forth.

Michael Armstrong was a child of deep feeling; and it was, perhaps, lucky for him, that the burning sense of shame and degradation which pervaded every nerve of his little frame, as he looked on upon this revolting spectacle, come upon him while yet too young for any notion of resistance to suggest itself. He felt faint, sick, and broken-hearted; but no worm that ever was crushed to atoms by the foot of an elephant dreamed less of vengeance than did poor Michael, as the horrid thought came over him, that he was going to

abide in a place where little boys were treated with less care and tenderness than pigs !

He turned away shuddering, and feeling almost unable to stand—and then the image of his mother seemed to rise before him—he felt her soft gentle kisses on his cheeks, and almost unconsciously pronounced her name. This dear name, lowly as it was murmured, came upon his ear so like the knell of happiness that was never to return, that the hard agony of his little heart melted before it, and sitting down upon a bundle of faggots that were piled up against the wall, he rested his burning head against the bricks, and burst into a passion of tears. At this moment he felt a hand upon his shoulder, and trembling from head to foot, he sprung upon his feet, and suddenly turning round beheld, instead of the savage features of the overlooker which his fancy had conjured up, the meekest, gentlest, loveliest little face, that ever eyes looked upon, within a few feet of him. It was the same little girl who had been placed next him at the miserable supper of the preceding night, and whose low murmur of pity for all the sorrow he was come to share with her had reached his ears and his heart.

“ You’ll be strapped dreadful if you bide

here," said the child. "Come away—and don't let them see you cry!" But even as she spoke she turned from him, and ran towards the door through which the miserable pilferers of the pig-trough were already hurrying.

Perhaps no other warning-voice would have been so promptly listened to at that moment by poor Michael, for it was something very like the numbing effect of despair that seized upon him; and it is likely enough he would have remained in the attitude he had taken, with his head resting against the wall, till the brutal violence of his task-master had dragged him from it, had not this pretty vision of pity appeared to warn him of his danger.

He rose and followed her so quickly, that by the time she had reached the crowd of children who were still thronging round the pump, he was by her side.

"Thank you!" whispered Michael in her ear. "It was very kind of you to call me—and I shouldn't have come if you hadn't—for I shouldn't care very much if they killed me."

"That's very naughty!" said the little girl.

"How *can* I be good?" demanded Michael, while the tears again burst from his eyes.

" 'Twas mother that made me good before, and I don't think I shall ever see her any more."

" I never can see my mother any more, till I go to Heaven," replied the little girl—" but I always think every day, that she told me before she died, about God's making every thing come right in the end, if we bear all things patiently for love of him."

" But God can't choose I should be taken from mother, and that's why I can't bear it," said Michael.

The little girl shook her head, very evidently disapproving his theology.

" How old are you ?" said Michael.

" Eleven years old three months ago, and that was one week after I came here," answered his new acquaintance.

" Then you are more than one whole year older than me," said Michael; " and I dare say you know better than I do; and I'll try to be good too, if you'll love me, and be kind to me always, like poor Edward. My name is Michael—what's your name ?"

" Fanny Fletcher," replied the little girl; " and I *will* love you, and be kind to you, if you'll be a good boy and bear it all patiently."

" I would bear it all patiently," said Michael,

"if I knew when I was to get away, and when you was to get away too. But perhaps we are to stay here for ever?" And again the tears ran down his cheeks.

"That's nonsense, Michael," said Fanny. "They can't keep us here for ever. When we die, we are sure to get away from them."

Michael opened his large eyes and looked at her with something like reproach. "When we die?" he repeated sadly. "Are we to stay here till we die?—I am never to see mother and Teddy any more, then?"

"Don't cry, Michael!" said the little girl, taking his hand—"We shall be sure to get out if God thinks it right. Don't cry so!"

"I wish I was as old as you," said Michael, with an accent expressive of great respect. "I should bear it better then."

As Michael ceased speaking he felt the little girl shudder. "Here he is!" she whispered, withdrawing her hand from him—"we musn't speak any more now."

"Off with you, vagabonds!" roared the voice of the apprentice-house governor, from behind them. "Don't you see the factory gates open?"

The miserable little troop waited for no

second summons, well knowing that the lash, which was now only idly cutting the air above their heads, would speedily descend upon them if they did; but not even terror could enable the wasting limbs of those who had long inhabited this fearful abode, to move quickly. Many among them were dreadfully crippled in the legs, and nearly all exhibited the frightful spectacle of young features pinched by famine.

* * * *

Let none dare to say this picture is exaggerated, till he has taken the trouble to ascertain by his own personal investigation that it is so. It is a very fearful crime in a country where public opinion has been proved (as in the African Slave Trade) to be omnipotent, for any individual to sit down with a shadow of doubt respecting such statements on his mind. If they be true, let each, in his own little circle, raise his voice against the horrors detailed by them, AND THESE HORRORS WILL BE REMEDIED. But woe to those who supinely sit in contented ignorance of the facts, soothing their spirits and their easy consciences with the cuckoo note "*Exaggeration!*" while thousands of helpless children pine away their

unnoted, miserable lives, in labour and destitution *incomparably more severe* than any ever produced by negro slavery.

* * * *

It was with a feeling certainly somewhat akin to comfort, that Michael found himself thrust into the same chamber with his gentle little monitor, Fanny. The mules they attended were side by side, and though no intercourse was permitted, that could by possibility interfere with the ceaseless labour of piecing, nevertheless, a word when their walk brought them near enough to each other to be heard was often exchanged between the children, and the effect of this on Michael was most salutary.

Superlatively, and above all others, wretched as are the miserable young victims apprenticed to factory masters, it is not unusual to find among them some helpless creature, whose first impressions were received under more favourable moral circumstances than those in which the pauper children of the manufacturing districts are placed. For it is from a distance from those unblessed regions that the great majority of apprentices are furnished; and the chances are, therefore, greatly in favour of their having first opened their eyes amidst

scenes of less ignorance, degradation, and suffering, than those born within reach of the poisonous factory influence.

Such was the case with Fanny Fletcher. It was not till mother and father were both dead that she had ceased to hear the voice of love, and the precepts of religion. For three years she had, indeed, been supported by the labour of a poor widowed mother ; but being her only child, Fanny had wanted nothing, had never been exposed to the hearing of coarse language, or the witnessing vicious habits ; and all her little studies had been so thoroughly mixed up with religious feelings, that, by the time she was ten years old, it would have been almost impossible to eradicate them, or rob her entirely of the gentle courage, and patient endurance, such feelings invariably lead to. When her mother died, all the world—her little world, consisting of a score of poor bodies of her own class, exclaimed “ Poor Fanny Fletcher ! ” But there was not one among them rich enough to save her from the workhouse, and to the workhouse therefore she went, whence within three months she was sent, with many others, as apprentices, to Deep Valley factory, ostensibly, and as doubtless the parish authorities believed, to learn a good

trade, but in truth to undergo a species of slavery, probably the most tremendous that young children were ever exposed to in any part of the known world, civilized or uncivilized.

That the desolate little creature suffered fearfully, both in body and mind, cannot be doubted; yet, at the time Michael first saw her, there was still that beautiful look of innocent patience in her eyes, which shows that the spirit, though bending under sorrow, is neither reckless nor degraded. Herself, and her companions from the workhouse to which she had been consigned at her mother's death, were the latest arrivals at Deep Valley when Michael reached it, and were still considered by the rest of the inmates as new-comers, who did not yet know the full misery of incessant labour, with strength daily failing for want of pure air and sufficient food. Fanny was by nature a slight delicate little creature, with an elastic sort of vitality about her which seemed to set fasting at defiance. That is to say, her sweet eye had not yet lost its brightness, but her beautifully fair cheek was very pale, and her delicate limbs most deplorably thin, though they had not reached that shrunk and wasted condition which was nearly general

among her companions. Michael looked at her as she bent over her threads, and repaired the incessant breakings among them with her white little hands, with a degree of love and pity which, while it wrung his heart, softened the hard despair that had nearly seized upon him, by making him feel, that though his mother and his brother were lost to him for long, long years, during which he was to taste of nothing but misery, still there was somebody who might grow to love him. This was a timely solace! Young as he was, he perceived at once, that instead of being brought to Deep Valley to *learn a trade*, he had been beguiled to enter there *bound* and helpless, for more years than he dared to count, and with no prospect of learning anything beyond the same slavish process of waiting upon the machinery, which had painfully occupied his daily existence, and that of his dearer brother, as long as they could remember to have lived. Under these circumstances, it was truly a great blessing to have found somebody of whom he might make a friend; and so strongly did the poor little fellow feel it, that when the miserable band were led to their morning meal, he told Fanny as he walked beside her, that he thought he should grow to behave better than he had

done that morning, if she would always talk to him about good things, and let him talk about mother and Teddy to her in return.

“ There’s a good boy !” replied Fanny, soothingly. “ I will talk to you, Michael, whenever I can ; and never mind,” she added, as they sat down again side by side at the long dirty board that formed their breakfast-table, “ never mind not having what’s good to eat, it won’t taste so nasty by and by, when you grow used to it.”

“ I won’t mind it !” replied Michael, manfully, as he supped the musty-flavoured watery mess. “ But I wish I had got a bit of good bread for you, Fanny !”

CHAPTER VII.

An explanatory epistle, which does not prove satisfactory—
Plans for the future, followed by active measures to carry
them into effect—A morning visit to Mrs. Gabberly.

DURING the whole of the day which followed Miss Brotherton's expedition to Hoxley-lane, that young lady remained waiting at home, not very patiently, for Sir Matthew Dowling's promised communication. But still it came not, and when, at an hour too late to hope for it any longer, she at length retired to bed, it was in a state of irritation and anxiety that left her little chance of quiet slumber.

Pale, harassed, and fearing she knew not what for the little fellow, for whose safety she had undertaken to answer, Miss Brotherton joined her good nurse at the breakfast-table, incapable of thinking or speaking upon any other subject. But it was in vain that the gentle-spirited Mrs. Tremlett again and again declared it to be "Impossible, and quite out of all likelihood, that Sir Matthew should mean any harm by the boy;" Mary, though

"weary of conjectures," could by no means end them by coming to the same conclusion; nor did the following letter, handed to her while she still sat before her untasted breakfast greatly tend to tranquillize her. It was from Sir Matthew Dowling himself, delicately enveloped, highly scented and sealed with prodigiously fine armorial bearings on a shield, almost large enough to have adorned the panels of a carriage. But all this perfection of elegance was lost on poor Mary, whose heart, indeed, seemed to leap into her throat as she tore open the important despatch. It contained the following lines :

"My charming Neighbour!

"If you knew, or could at all guess, how fervently I admire the beautiful benevolence you have manifested, in trying to quiet the fidgety spirit of poor widow Armstrong, you would be better able to appreciate the vexation I feel at not yet being able fully to answer your inquiries concerning her boy. Think not, my dearest Miss Brotherton, that I neglected this business yesterday; on the contrary, I do assure you I gave my whole attention to it: nevertheless, I have by no means succeeded in learning what you wish to know.

The facts of the case are these. A most respectable stocking-manufacturer, with whom, however, my foreman is better acquainted than myself, employs a multitude of young hands, most of whom are apprentices, in the different branches of his business. It was to this person, that the weak and wavering poor woman for whom you are interested agreed to intrust her boy. Indentures were accordingly prepared, and I gave my superintendent orders to have the little fellow supplied with all necessaries, desiring that no time might be lost in getting him ready, as I knew that people belonging to this stocking-weaving establishment were likely to pass through Ashleigh in a day or two, and I wished, if possible, to avoid having the trouble of sending him to his destination myself. Now it unfortunately happened, that my man, Parsons, obeyed this order much more literally than I intended; for meeting in Ashleigh the persons I had named to him the very next day, he immediately mentioned the circumstance to them, and finding that they had a comfortable van, and every thing convenient with them, the whole business was arranged and done before I returned from a visit I had been making at Netherby. This was certainly being more

prompt than was necessary, but it would have mattered little, comparatively speaking, had he not been such a goose as to let the van drive off, without even asking to which of the manufactories of the establishment it was going. Yet, although this is vexing, my dear Miss Brotherton, I should think it could not be very important. I have told Parsons to write about it immediately, and he shall wait upon you with the information you wish for, as soon as he receives it.

"Will you, my fair friend, join us in a little pic-nic party, projected by our young people for Thursday next, 'under the greenwood tree' in Blackberry Wood? Lady Clarissa is, of course, to be one of our society, and she will communicate all particulars respecting place and time.

"Ever, my dear Miss Brotherton,

"Very faithfully yours,

"MATTHEW DOWLING."

Having read this letter to the end, she turned the sheet, and began a re-perusal of it, without uttering a word, and when she had again reached its conclusion, she put it into the hands of Mrs. Tremlett, still without speaking a word. Before, however, that ex-

cellent, but not rapid lady, had got half through it, poor Mary's agitation broke forth—

“What do you think of it, nurse? for Heaven's sake, give me your opinion without delay. I am quite sure, that the poor creatures in Hoxley-lane, whom I have beguiled with my presumptuous promises, will pine themselves to death with this uncertainty. Tremlett! for mercy's sake finish reading it, and tell me what I can do more!”

It might not have been very easy for any one to have satisfactorily answered this inquiry; but the good Mrs. Tremlett was altogether incapable of forming any opinion worth hearing on the subject, for in truth she neither shared, nor fully comprehended the vague fears that were tormenting her young mistress.

Having, however, at length, despite of Mary's interruptions, contrived to reach the end of the epistle, her first words were—

“Don't, my darling Miss Mary!—Let me beg of you to refuse at once. There is nothing in the whole world so dangerous and cold-catching, as these foolish parties on the damp grass. And besides, the evenings are drawing in now, and I'm sure ——”

“Oh, Nurse Tremlett! Nurse Tremlett!”

interrupted Mary, more angry with her than she had ever been in her whole life before, "How can you be so cruel as to trifle thus? Why won't you try to think a little for me about this strange mysterious business, and give me your opinion?"

"Lord bless you, Miss Mary, if you were to kill me, I could no more help thinking of you first than I could fly," replied Mrs. Tremlett. "And, indeed, my dear, I don't see what you should put yourself into such a fuss for. What can you think is going to happen to the little boy? You'll just spoil that poor sickly body, my dear child, if you encourage her in having such tantrums, because her boy set out upon his journey a day, maybe, earlier than she expected."

"Then you really and truly do not believe it possible, nurse, that Sir Matthew Dowling should have smuggled the boy away, without intending to let us know where he has sent him?" said Miss Brotherton.

"Good gracious, no, Miss Mary!" replied her friend.

For a moment this opinion brought some consolation with it, simply from the decision with which it was uttered; but the next, all her anxiety returned again, for though she

felt that there was, perhaps, something improbable and exaggerated in the idea of the child's being kidnapped in the face of day, and as it were before a hundred witnesses, there was at least no delusion as to his unhappy mother's state of mind respecting him, nor in the fact of her having in some sort pledged her own word, that the poor woman and her lame boy should receive tidings of him.

A little further conversation with Mrs. Tremlett convinced her that her opinion on the subject could be of no great value, inasmuch as it was founded solely on the notion, that "It was not likely Sir Matthew Dowling should want to hide away the little boy."

"No!" thought Mary. "Nor was it likely he should have acted, looked, and spoken as I saw him do, when his poor girl lost her senses from agony at my having witnessed it. If I misdoubt him unjustly, I will be careful that it shall not injure him. I will await his own time for information. If it comes, no one will be the worse for the impatience with which I shall have waited for it. But, if it comes not, I can be doing no wrong by taking every means of seeking it."

In conformity with this resolution, Miss

Brotherton not only waited with tolerable external composure herself, but continued in a great degree to tranquillize the spirits of the widow Armstrong likewise; and during a whole week, Sir Matthew Dowling was permitted to remain unmolested. Miss Brotherton, indeed, did not meet him under the greenwood-tree, pleading an indisposition, which was not quite imaginary, as her excuse, but she troubled him with no more questions.

On the day fixed for this *al fresco* meeting of nearly the whole neighbourhood, Edward Armstrong was appointed to pay his first visit to Millford Park. During her almost daily visits to his mother, she had remarked that, though he uttered not a word in contradiction of the reasonings, by which she sought to show the improbability that any mischief could have befallen Michael, his speaking features expressed no confidence in them; and wishing upon this day of general riding and driving, to remain within her own gates, she determined to take the opportunity of conversing with him alone.

She was by herself in her pretty boudoir when he arrived, and perceiving that his pale face was flushed by heat and exercise, she made him set down on the sofa beside her.

There was something singularly sad in the utter indifference with which his young eye wandered over all the striking and unwonted objects that surrounded him. When bade to sit beside the young lady on her silken couch, he obeyed without seeming at all conscious that the rest he needed was now afforded in more dainty style than usual, and all the intelligence of his soul seemed settled in his eyes as he looked into the face of Miss Brotherton, and faintly murmured—

“Is there any news of him?”

“No, Edward, there is not,” replied Mary, firmly; “but surely, my dear boy, this delay cannot justify the look of misery it produces on your countenance. Tell me, Edward, what is it that you fear for Michael?”

“I do not know myself,” replied the boy. “And yet I think it over in my head day and night, only to find out what is the very worst possible they can do to him.”

“But is that wise, Edward, or is it right, think you, while your poor mother has only you left to comfort her, that you should only strive to fill your own head and hers with the very worst thoughts your fancy can conjure up?”

“I do not fill mother’s head with them,”

replied Edward. "I have never told her one single word of all my dismal thoughts."

"Then you are a good boy, and I love you for it. But what are your dismal thoughts, Edward? You may tell them to me."

The boy hesitated for a moment, and then said—"I think Sir Matthew Dowling is a wicked, cruel man; and I think that he would be more likely to be wicked and cruel to Michael than good to him."

"What is it has made you think Sir Matthew cruel and wicked, Edward?" demanded Miss Brotherton.

"Because he is hard and unjust to those who labour for him; and because I have seen him laugh and make sport of the tears of little children."

There was something in the accents of the boy that startled Mary. She felt inclined to exclaim—"How much more older art thou than thy looks!" so thrilling was the tone, and so profound the feeling with which he spoke.

"Yet still," she replied, "it is difficult to see that he could gain any advantage by ill-using Michael in any way bad enough to make you look so miserable, Edward."

"If he keeps him from me is not that

enough?" said the pale boy, looking reproachfully at her.

"But, Edward, you knew that he was going to leave you; and your mother, at least, consented to it."

"Yes, she did consent to it. Poor, dear mother! she did consent to it. But had I been true, as I ought to have been, she never would," said Edward, clasping his hands and closing his eyes with a look of intense suffering.

"Explain yourself, my dear boy," said Mary, kindly. "In what have you been otherwise than true?"

"We agreed together—poor Michael and me agreed together, never to let mother know how bad we were served at the mill—and, above all, we agreed that she should never know how miserable Michael was at the great house, 'cause we was sure she'd have him away, and so lose the bit of comfortable food she has been having. But it was wrong and wicked to deceive her. We should have told her all, and then Michael would have never gone!"

"You acted for the best, my dear boy, and must not reproach yourself," replied Mary; "and so far am I from thinking it wrong to

keep her mind easy in her present state of health, that I strongly advise her being still comforted as much as possible by our manner of talking to her. Fear not, Edward, that I shall neglect the safety of Michael, because you will not hear me talk of his being in any danger. I will not rest till I know what has become of him."

Mary said this in a tone that left no doubt of her sincerity; and it was then for the first time that Edward seemed to remember her greatness. He stood up before her with a look of tender reverence inexpressibly touching, and said solemnly—"Then God will bless you for it!"

"And he will bless you, my dear child!" replied Mary, with tears starting to her eyes. "He will bless and comfort you for all your duty and affection. Keep up your spirits, Edward, and, above all things, never be idle. It is for your mother's sake as well as your own that I am so anxious you should learn to read and write, dear Edward; and by degrees we shall get you on to ciphering, and who knows but we may make a clerk or accountant of you, and so enable you to get money, even if your health is not very good."

The boy smiled languidly as he replied, "I

should like it very much, if I was to live long enough."

"You will get stout and well, Edward," said Mary, cheerfully, "now that you have no hard work to do. And you shall come up to the same school that all my boys and girls go to here; and when school is over, you must come every day to my kitchen with a little basket for your mother. You understand, Edward? And once every week you must come up into this room to me with your books, that I may see your writing and hear you read a little."

A gleam of hope and joy kindled in the boy's beautiful eyes as he listened to her, and a bright blush mantled his pale cheeks; but it was like the flitting sunshine of April chased by a heavy cloud almost before its warmth could be felt or its beauty seen. "Oh, if Michael could but hear that!" he exclaimed, while tears, for the first time since the conversation began, burst from his eyes. "*That* was what poor Michael always wanted. If I could but learn, and so get my bread without mill-slavery, Mike always said he would not mind working himself, 'cause he was so strong. But now that very thing is come; and he, maybe, will never know it!"

Heavy and fast drops fell from beneath the hand which he had raised to conceal his face, till Mary, as she watched him, wept for company. This, however, was not the way to help him, and conquering a weakness so every way unwise, she spoke to him with affectionate but steady firmness of the exertion it was his duty to make at a time when his mother had none but him to comfort her. She had touched the right string—the little fellow's nerves seemed braced, and every faculty awakened by the words she uttered; and if he took back to his mother no tidings of poor Michael, he brought to her support a young spirit strong in endurance, and an intellect that, for the first time, had whispered to its owner hopes, promises, and aspirations, which seemed to make the life he had often loathed a new-found treasure to him. Mary saw not all that passed in the young mind she had rescued from the listless languor of despair; yet she perceived enough to satisfy her that she had done him good, and that, however vain her hopes of benefiting the miserable Drakes might be, there could be no doubt that, in this case at least, her efforts would not prove wholly abortive.

It is wonderful what an energy and renewed impetus this conviction gave to her spirits!

No mildew can blast more surely, or bring a more lamentable feeling of withering over the heart than that caused by the cold and false philosophy which would check every effort to do good, lest by possibility success might not attend it.

The remainder of this day was by no means spent unhappily by the warm-hearted little heiress. The schoolmistress was made to expect Edward on the morrow—and the cook was made to expect Edward on the morrow. One Mercury was despatched to the town for a choice collection of slates, copies, spelling-books, and the like, and another to Mary's tailor in ordinary, with instructions to call on the widow Armstrong, and take measure of her son. All this business, and a good deal more tending the same way, having been satisfactorily got through in the course of the day that kept all the Ashleigh world safely entangled in the thickets of Blackberry Wood, Mary Brotherton lay down to rest, and slept exceedingly well, though not urged thereto by having shared in their pleasant fatigues.

She rose the next morning with a sort of pleasant consciousness of increasing power to walk alone in this busy world, and gaily announced at breakfast to Mrs. Tremlett her

purpose of immediately making a visit of speculation to Mrs. Gabberly, in order to ascertain if any gossip was yet afloat respecting the disappearance of Sir Matthew Dowling's far-famed protégé. The distance from Miss Brotherton's mansion to Mrs. Gabberly's cottage was not great, and the heiress traversed it without having any fear of officers before her eyes, or any other protection than her parasol.

She was, of course, received with expressions of unmitigated astonishment at her absence from the gala of the preceding day.

"What on earth, my dear child, could have kept you away?" said the animated lady.

"Perhaps I was afraid of taking cold, Mrs. Gabberly. Mrs. Tremlett took care I should remember how short the days are growing."

"Mrs. Tremlett!—Nonsense!—Well now, I can tell you that you just lost the most delightful day that anybody ever had. Such a dinner!—Game of all kinds—almost all in savoury jelly too! Think of that! So wholesome, you know, with the spice; and eating it in the open air, and all. Depend upon it, my dear Miss Brotherton, that if you suffer yourself to be boxed up by that ignorant old woman, you will very soon lose your health

altogether. And, do you know, I can't help thinking that you do look rather feverish to-day—your eyes have that sort of brightness. I wish to goodness you would let me feel your pulse."

"Nothing will do my pulse so much good, my dear Mrs. Gabberly, as your telling me all the news you heard yesterday," said the young lady, good-humouredly shaking the hand that was extended to ascertain her state of health.

"Well now, my dear, I am sure I have no objection in the world to tell you, and certainly one does pick up a vast deal of information at such a party as that. Will you believe it? Two of the Simmonses are going to be married!"

"Really! That's very good news, I suppose. Had you a great many people there?"

"Oh! Every body, just every body, but your own dear self; and I can truly say that if you had been there, it would have been quite perfect!"

"You are very kind; but a person so very much afraid of taking cold is always troublesome on these *al fresco* occasions. Lady Clarissa was there, of course?"

"Of course, my dear. And *such* a flirtation with Sir Matthew! God knows I ain't over strict in any way; I despise it, because

it shows such ignorance of life and good society. But I must say, I *do* think they carry the thing a little too far. Of course, a lady of rank and title, like Lady Clarissa, is not to be judged altogether like common people. I am quite aware of that, and nothing can be more thoroughly vulgar than forgetting this. And I certainly have lived too much in really first-rate good society not to know it. But, nevertheless, you know, there is reason in roasting eggs, and even an earl's daughter *may* get talked of."

"Was Lady Dowling in presence?" inquired Miss Brotherton, smiling.

"No, my dear, thank God, she was not, or we should have had sour looks with our sweet-meats, I can tell you."

"Did Sir Matthew bring his little favourite with him? The little boy he has adopted, you know?"

"Oh! dear, haven't you heard all that yet? Well now, upon my word, Mary Brotherton, it will *not* do, your shutting yourself up in this way. Catching cold, indeed! As if I, the daughter of my own poor dear father, wasn't likely to know more than Mrs. Tremlett about catching cold! Why, my dear, the little boy has been sent away, I don't know how long, with a monstrous premium,

paid by Sir Matthew, to get him entered at one of the first commercial houses in Europe. Dr. Crockley was exceedingly agreeable and attentive to me all day yesterday. And, indeed, so he was, I must say, to every body. We do sometimes differ about spinal complaints, and I think he is a great deal too speculative. But it is impossible to deny that he can be very agreeable when he chooses it, and it was he that told me all about this last noble act of Sir Matthew. To be sure he is an honour to the country if ever there was one, Sir Matthew, I mean. It is such men as that, Miss Brotherton, that brings wealth and prosperity to our glorious country. To think only of the hands he employs! Fifteen hundred children, taking all his mills together, he told us yesterday, besides several women and men. Oh! it is glorious to be sure! However Dr. Crockley did just whisper to me, but I don't believe he meant it should go much farther, he did certainly hint, that poor cross Lady Dowling did not like to have the little fellow in the house; and that was one reason why good Sir Matthew was in such a hurry to place him."

"Did you happen to hear to what part of the country the boy had been sent, Mrs. Gaberly?"

"Why, no! my dear, I can't say I did.

But that makes no difference you know. Everybody is aware that it is a noble situation for him, and that's the main point of course."

"Oh! certainly. I only asked from idle curiosity. And I suppose, Mrs. Gabberly, that it is because I am so idle, that I do often feel curious about things that nobody else seems to care about. Do you know I am dying to get into a factory, and see all these dear little children at work. It must be so pretty to see them all looking so proud and so happy, and all enjoying themselves so much! I really must get a peep at it," said Miss Brotherton.

"La! my dear! What a very queer notion," replied Mrs. Gabberly.

"Perhaps it is," said Mary smiling, "as nobody else in the whole neighbourhood ever talks about it; but if I have such a fancy, there can be no reason why I should not indulge it, can there?"

"Why, good gracious, my dear child! only think of the dirt! You would be downright poisoned, Mary."

"Poisoned? How can that be, dear Mrs. Gabberly, when everybody agrees that it is such a blessing to the country to have brought such multitudes of children to work together in these factories?"

"Nonsense, my dear!" replied Mrs. Gabberly, knitting her brows. "This is some of Mrs. Tremlett's vulgar ignorance, I am very sure. How can a girl of your good understanding, Miss Brotherton, speak as if what was good and proper for the working classes had any thing to do with such as you. Fie! my dear! Pray never let any body in the neighbourhood hear you talk in this strange wild way; I do assure you, that there is nothing that would do you so much injury in the opinion of all the first families hereabouts. And nobody knows this neighbourhood better than I do."

"I am quite aware of that, Mrs. Gabberly," said the young lady very respectfully, "and that is one reason why I wish to talk to you about this notion of mine. Is it really true, Mrs. Gabberly, that none of the ladies in the neighbourhood ever go into the factories?"

"To be sure it is. Why should they go, for goodness' sake?"

"Oh! I don't know exactly. But I cannot see why they should not—if they wished it," replied Miss Brotherton, modestly.

"Well now, but I do, my dear. And I do beg and entreat that you won't talk any more about it. I am quite sure, Mary, that some-

body or other has been talking nonsense to you about all this. If you had got any friends or connexions towards Fairly now, I should think they had been telling you all the romantic stuff that has been hatching there about factory children, and God knows what beside. But I don't believe you have ever gone visiting that way, have you, my dear?"

"And who is there at Fairly, dear Mrs Gabberly, who would be likely to talk to me on such a subject?" said Mary, colouring to the temples, with eagerness to hear the answer. "Good gracious! my dear, did you never hear tell of that poor wrong-headed clergyman, George Bell? Such a difference to be sure between one man and another. My dear good Mr. Gabberly never in his life breathed a word that could hurt the feelings of his neighbours. He visited them every one, and was on the best and most friendly terms with them all, which is what I call living in the true spirit of Christian charity. Whereas this tiresome, troublesome Mr. Bell has taken it into his head to find out wrong, where everybody else sees nothing but right; and God forbid, my dear, that you should take it into *your* dear innocent head to follow any of his mischievous fancies! I wonder what he'll get by it? Great

goose he must be, to be sure, not to see that he is going exactly the way to set everybody that can be of the least use to him smack against him in all things!"

"What is it he does, Mrs. Gabberly, that is so very wrong?" demanded Miss Brotherton.

"What is it he does? Why, just every thing he ought not to do, my dear, that's all. You would hardly believe, perhaps, that a clergyman should actually encourage the poor to complain of the very labour by which they live? And yet, I give you my word and honour, that is exactly what he has been doing. It's incredible, isn't it, almost? He positively says, loud enough for all the country to hear him, that the labour in the factories—such a blessing as it is to the poor—he actually says that it is bad for the children's health. Such stuff, you know, my dear, as if the medical men did not know best; and there's numbers of 'em that declare that it's quite impossible to tell in any way satisfactory that it can do 'em any harm at all. And, upon my word, I don't know what poor people will come to! It's quite out of the question to attempt pleasing 'em. If they've got no work they are perfectly outrageous about that, and ready to tear

people to pieces just to get it ; and no sooner is there enough to do, than away they go bawling again, swearing that the children are over-worked : isn't it provoking, my dear ? ”

“ Mr. George Bell ? ” said Mary, very distinctly.

“ Yes, my dear, that's the name of the foolish man who seems to take a pleasure in making people fancy they are not well enough off, when I'm sure, by all I can hear and understand, these very identical people may consider themselves first and foremost of the whole world for prosperity,” replied Mrs. Gabberly.

“ Fairly ? ” rejoined Miss Brotherton, interrogatively.

“ Yes, my dear, Fairly 's where he lives, if I don't mistake.”

“ Good morning, Mrs. Gabberly,” said the young lady, rising somewhat abruptly : “ I am very glad you had such a pleasant day yesterday. Good bye.” And without permitting the stream of Mrs. Gabberly's eloquence to swell forth upon her afresh, the heiress slipped through the parlour-door, and escaped.

CHAPTER VIII.

A voyage of discovery—A plain statement, leading to the conviction that even where ignorance is not bliss, knowledge is not always happiness—A hasty friendship that may nevertheless prove lasting.

To order the carriage, and to give Mrs. Tremlett notice that she wished her to make all speed in preparing to accompany her in it, was to Miss Brotherton the work of a moment. As the business she was upon might, however, take some hours, she urged her old friend to eat luncheon as if certain of having no dinner; and having given time for this, and interrogated her coachman concerning distance and so forth, the hopeful, animated girl sprang into her carriage as the clock struck two, determined not to re-enter her mansion till she had lost some portion of the ignorance which had of late so cruelly tormented her.

The roads were good, and by the help of a short bait, Miss Brotherton and her companion reached Fairly turnpike a little after

four. Here she made inquiries for the residence of Mr. Bell, and having learned in what direction she should find it, repeated the instructions to her coachman, and bade him drive on.

"Are the horses to be put up there, ma'am?" demanded the coachman.

"Yes—no, James, not there, I suppose—that is, not at the clergyman's house: but of course you will be able to find some place quite near, you know; and William must wait—no, not wait, but come back as soon as he knows where you put up, that I may send for you when I am ready."

To these, not over-clear, instructions James answered "Yes, ma'am," and drove off.

In obedience to the directions received at the toll-bar, the carriage soon left the high-road, and proceeded down a grassy lane, which harvest carts for the time had rolled into smoothness. Less than a quarter of a mile of this brought the wanderers to another turning, that in five minutes placed them before the gates of an edifice the aspect of which made Mary pull the check-string.

"That looks like a parsonage-house! Does it not?" said Miss Brotherton.

And before Mrs. Tremlett could answer,

William had already opened the door, and let down the steps. It was very easy to get out, and very easy to inquire if Mr. Bell were at home; but when answered in the affirmative, Miss Brotherton felt that it was not very easy to decide in what manner to explain the cause of her visit to the object of it. She had by no means settled this point to her satisfaction, when the door of a small parlour, lined with books, was opened to her, and she found herself in the presence of the gentleman she had so unceremoniously come to visit.

There was much in the countenance of Mr. Bell to reassure a more timid spirit than that of Mary Brotherton: nevertheless she stood before him for a minute, or two in some embarrassment, not so much from fear of him, as of herself. Did she fail to make him at once understand the motive of her inquiries, he could not avoid thinking both them and herself impertinent, and this consciousness caused a much brighter glow than usual to mantle her cheeks, as she stood before him, with her eyes fixed timidly, and almost beseechingly, on his face.

Although Miss Brotherton had not quite the easy and (*tant soit peu*) assured air of a woman of fashion, there was enough in her

appearance to indicate her claim to observance, as well as admiration; and Mr. Bell opened the conversation by earnestly requesting that she would sit down.

His aspect had done much towards giving her courage, and his voice did more.

"You are very kind, sir," said she, "to receive so courteously a stranger, who has in truth no excuse whatever to offer for thus intruding on you. Nevertheless I am greatly tempted to hope, that if I can succeed in making you understand the object of my visit, you will forgive the freedom of it."

"And I," returned Mr. Bell, smiling, "am greatly tempted to believe that, let the object of this visit be what it may, I must always feel grateful to it. Is there anything, my dear young lady, that I can do to serve you?"

"There is indeed, Mr. Bell!" she replied, with great earnestness of voice and manner. "I am come to you for instruction. Though you do not know me, you probably may know the place at which I live. My name is Mary Brotherton, and my house is called Millford Park."

"Certainly, Miss Brotherton, both your name, and that of your residence are known

to me—on what subject can I give you any information that may be useful?"

"Circumstances, Mr. Bell, have lately directed my attention to a subject which my own situation in life, as well as the neighbourhood in which I live, ought to have long ago made thoroughly familiar to me—such is not the case, however; I am profoundly, and I fear shamefully, ignorant respecting the large and very important class of our population employed in the factories. I am in possession of a large fortune wholly amassed from the profits obtained by my father from this species of labour, and I cannot but feel great interest in the welfare and prosperity of the people employed in it—especially as I understand a very large proportion of them are young children—and moreover, that, from some cause or other, which I can by no means understand, the whole class of 'the factory people,' as I hear them called, are spoken of with less kindness and respect by those who have grown rich upon their industry, than any other description of human beings whatever. I am told, sir, that it would be *unsafe, improper*, and altogether *wrong* were I to attempt making myself personally acquainted with them, as I would wish to do—and having accidentally,

Mr. Bell, heard your name mentioned as a person who took an interest in their concerns, I have come to you thus unceremoniously, in the hope that you would have the kindness to give me more accurate information on the subject, than I have found it possible to obtain elsewhere."

Mr. Bell, who had placed himself immediately opposite to her, looked in her young face, and listened to her earnest voice as she spoke, with the deepest attention. It soon became sufficiently clear that he considered not this intrusion as requiring apology, but that on the contrary his very heart and soul were moved by her words. He paused for a moment after she had ceased speaking, as if unwilling to interrupt her by his reply; but when he found that she remained silent, he said,

"The subject on which you are come to converse with me, my dear Miss Brotherton, is assuredly the very last I should have expected to hear named by a young lady in your position—for it is one from which the rich and great of our district turn away with loathing and contempt. Yet is it the one of all others to which I would, if possible, direct their best attention, involving as it does

both their interest and their duty beyond any other. But I fear I cannot enter upon it without wounding many prejudices which of necessity you must have imbibed, and proving to you that much, which doubtless you have been educated to consider right, is on the contrary most lamentably wrong. Can you bear this, my dear young lady?"

"I hope I could, in a search after truth, Mr. Bell, even if my mind were in the condition you suppose," replied Mary. "But this is not the case. You will not have to remove many false impressions I think. It is the total absence of all knowledge on the subject, which I am bold enough to ask you to remedy."

"And most willingly will I endeavour to do so, to the very best of my ability," replied Mr. Bell. "But to me it is a beguiling subject, and if I detain you too long, you must tell me so."

"Fear not," replied Mary, smiling. "I shall be more willing to hear than you to speak."

"You are of course aware, Miss Brotherton," resumed the clergyman, "that the large proportion of young labourers to whom you have just alluded are calculated to amount, in

Yorkshire and Lancashire alone, to upwards of two hundred thousand?"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Mary. "Alas! Mr. Bell, you must not think that '*of course*' I know anything—had you named two thousand as the number, my surprise would have been less."

"But so it is, Miss Brotherton. Above two hundred thousand young creatures, including infants among them, counting only five years of life, are thus employed in the counties I have named; and they surely form a class, which, both from their numbers and their helplessness, are entitled to English sympathy and protection."

"Unquestionably!" cried Mary, eagerly, "I always feel that the labouring poor have great and unceasing claims upon the sympathy and assistance of the rich. But this claim must be equally great I should suppose amongst all the labouring classes. Is it not, Mr. Bell?"

"I feel it difficult to answer your question by a negative," he replied, "because, taken in its broadest sense, it most assuredly demands an affirmative. Nevertheless it is unquestionably true that at this moment there is no race of human beings in any portion of

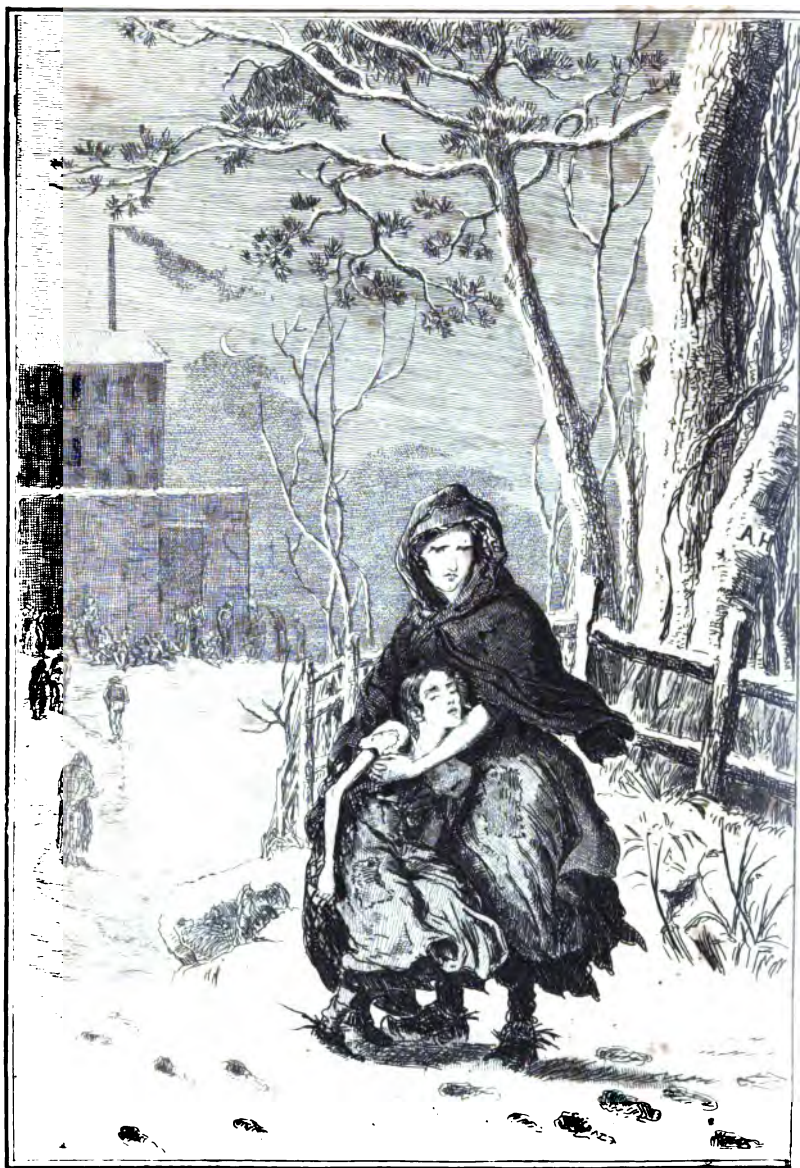
the known world—the most wretched of negro slaves not excepted, Miss Brotherton—who require the protection and assistance of their happier fellow-creatures, in the same degree as the young creatures employed in our factories.”

Miss Brotherton looked at him, not doubt-ingly, but with considerable surprise, and timidly replied, “But the negro slave, Mr. Bell, has no choice left him—he is the *property* of his master.”

“Neither has the factory child a choice, Miss Brotherton. He too is a *property*; nor is it the least horrible part of the evil which noiselessly has grown out of this tremendous system, that the beings whom nature has ordained throughout creation to keep watch and ward over the helpless weakness of infant life, are driven by it to struggle with, and trample down the holiest and dearest of human ties—even the love of a parent for its offspring. Picture to yourself a bleak winter’s morning, Miss Brotherton, when the mother of factory children must be up hours and hours before the sun to rouse her half-rested little ones; and nervously watching her rude clock till the dreaded moment comes, must shake the little creatures, whose slumber the

very beast of the field might teach her to watch over and guard, till they awake, and starting in terror from their short sleep, ask if the hour be come? The wretched mother and the wretched child then vie with each other in their trembling haste to seize the tattered mill-clothes, and to put them on. The mother dreads the fine of one quarter of the infant's daily wages, which would be levied, should it arrive but a minute too late, and the poor child dreads the strap, which, in addition, is as surely the punishment for delay. Miss Brotherton, I have seen with my own eyes the assembling of some hundreds of factory children before the still unopened doors of their prison-house, while the lingering darkness of a winter's night had yet to last three hours. I shall never forget one bitter morning, last January twelvemonth! The last piteous summons from a dying parishioner had left me no choice but to exchange my pillow for the bitter biting blast of Howley Common, and the path across it leading me within a hundred yards of a large cotton-factory, I witnessed a spectacle, which to my dying day I shall never recall without a shudder! There was just room enough to show me all the dreary sternness of the scene. The ground

was covered deep with snow, and a cutting wind blew whistling through the long line of old Scotch firs which bordered an enclosure beside the road. As I scudded on beneath them, my eye caught the little figures of a multitude of children, made distinctly visible, even by that dim light, by the strong relief in which their dark garments showed themselves against the snow. A few steps further brought me in full view of the factory gates, and then I perceived considerably above two hundred of these miserable little victims to avarice all huddled together on the ground, and seemingly half buried in the drift that was blown against them. I stood still and gazed upon them—I knew full well what, and how great was the terror which had brought them there too soon, and in my heart of hearts I cursed the boasted manufacturing wealth of England, which running in this direction at least, in a most darkened narrow channel, gives power, *lawless and irresistible*, to overwhelm and crush the land it pretends to fructify. While still spell-bound by this appalling picture, I was startled by the sound of a low moaning from the other side of the road, at a short distance from me, and turning towards it perceived a woman bending over a little



I was startled by the sound of a low moaning, and perceived a woman bending over a little girl who appeared sinking to the ground.



girl who appeared sinking to the ground. A few rapid steps brought me close to them, and I found on examination that the child was so benumbed and exhausted as to be totally incapable of pursuing her way—it was her *mother* who was urging her forward, and who even then seemed more intent upon saving a fine, than on the obvious sufferings of her sinking child. I know, poor wretch, that little choice was left her, and that the inevitable consequence of saving her from the factory, and leading her gently home to such shelter as her father's roof could give, would be to watch her perish there for want of food."

"Alas! alas! is it thus my wealth has been accumulated?" exclaimed Miss Brotherton, shuddering. "Is there no power in England, sir, righteous and strong enough to stay this plague?"

"Miss Brotherton!" returned the clergyman, "such power, and such righteousness, must be found, or this plague, as you well call it, will poison the very life-blood of our political existence; and long ere any serious danger is likely to be dreamed of by our heedless rulers, the bloated wealth, with which this pernicious system has enriched a few, will prove a source of utter destruction to the

many. Never, my dear young lady, did the avarice of man conceive a system so horribly destructive of every touch of human feeling, as that by which the low-priced agony of labouring infants is made to eke out and supply all that is wanting to enable the giant engines of our factories to outspin all the world! But you must see it, Miss Brotherton, you must watch it with your own eyes, you must follow the hateful operations of this atrocious system into the thousands of sordid and forgotten huts which cover its miserable victims, ere you can possibly understand its moral mischief. There is no strength, no power in words to paint it."

"Its moral mischief," said Mary, eagerly; "explain that to me, Mr. Bell, for it is the point I find most puzzling—why is it that these poor factory-people, because they labour more unremittingly, as it should seem, than all the world beside; why, for this reason, instead of being honoured for their industry, are they invariably spoken of with contempt and obloquy?"

"Your question, Miss Brotherton, involves by far the most terrible portion of this frightful commercial mystery," he replied; "but, as I have told you, nothing except personal investigation can enable the inquirer to arrive at

the whole truth respecting it. Were a patient, accurate, and laborious detail of all the enormities committed, and all the sufferings endured, under the factory system, to be presented to the public, it would be thrown aside by some, as greatly too tedious for examination, and by others as a statement too atrocious to merit belief. Yet, England must listen to it, and that soon, or she may mourn her negligence when it is too late to repair it. That marvellous machinery of which we make our boast, Miss Brotherton, is not more perfect in its power of drawing out the delicately attenuated thread which it is our glory to produce, than the system for reducing the human labour necessary for its production to the lowest possible price is, for degrading the moral nature of the helpless slaves engaged in it."

"That the system has such a tendency I cannot doubt, after the repeated assurances which have reached me that so it is," replied Mary. "Nevertheless, I am still unable to comprehend why it should be so."

"You have only to take advantage of your residence near Ashleigh, Miss Brotherton, the dense population of which subsists almost wholly by factory labour, in order to understand, but too well, why this terrible result is

inevitable. You are as yet too young a lady for me to expect that you should have very deeply studied the nature of the human mind, or made yourself fully aware how greatly the habits and character of all human beings depend upon education, and the circumstances in which they are placed. Nevertheless, if you turn your attention to the subject, you will not, young as you are, be long incapable of detecting the dangers which beset the hearts and souls of those whose unhappy destiny have made them factory labourers. The dark little circle in which they move from birth to death, from father to son, from mother to daughter, is so uniform, that almost any average individual case may fairly serve as a specimen of the whole class. Boys and girls, with few exceptions, labour indiscriminately altogether in the factories. While still almost children, they form connexions, and are married. Having worked in the mills, probably from five years old to the hour of their unweighed and thoughtless union, the boy assumes the duties of a husband with little more knowledge of moral or religious responsibility than the brute animal that labours with a thousand times less degradation in the fields; while the childish wife comes to her important task igno-

rant of every earthly usefulness, save what belongs to the mechanical drudgery in which throughout the whole of her short, sad life she has been made to follow the uniform and ceaseless movements of machinery. She cannot sew, she cannot cook, she cannot iron, she cannot wash. Her mind is yet more untaught and undisciplined than her hands. She is conscious of no responsibility, she knows no law by which to steer her actions, or regulate her spirit, and becomes a mother as she became a wife, without one single thought of duty mixing itself with her increasing cares. By degrees, both the husband and the wife find employment in the factory less certain. It is for children, children, children, that the unwearied engine calls, and keenly does the hungry father, and the mother too, watch the growth of the little creatures to whom they have given birth, till the slight limbs have firmness enough to stand, and the delicate joints are sufficiently under the command of the frightened will to tie threads together under the potent inspiration of the overlooker's strap. Then comes a state of deeper degradation still. The father is idle, for often he can get no work, and it is to the labour of his little ones that he looks for bread. Nature recoils from the spectacle of

their unnatural, overlaboured aspect as they return from their thirteen, fourteen, fifteen hours of toil. He has not nerve to look upon it, and creeps to the gin-shops till they are hid in bed. The mother sees it all, and sternly screws her courage to the task of lifting their bruised and weary limbs upon their bed of straw, putting into their mouths the food she has prepared, their weary eyes being already closed in sleep, and preparing herself to wake before the sun on the morrow, that with unrelenting hand she may drag them from their unfinished slumber, and drive them forth again to get her food. This is no varnished tale, Miss Brother-ton, but the bare, naked, hideous truth. And can you wonder that beings thus reared and ripened should form a degraded class? Can you wonder that all others should turn from them, as from a race with whom they have nothing in common? If some sad accident, preceding birth, disturbs the beautiful process by which nature prepares the noble being she has made to be lord of all, and an abortive creature comes to life, curtailed of all its fair proportions, both of mind and body, all within reach of the hapless prodigy shudder as they mourn, and the best and wisest among them pray to God that its span of life be short. But

believe me when I tell you, Miss Brotherton, that the effect which the factories of this district is producing upon above two hundred thousand of its population is beyond all calculation more deplorable; and many a child is born amongst them whose destiny, if fairly weighed against that of such a one as I have described, would appear incomparably more terrible."

"Can such things be, and the rulers of the land sit idly by to witness it?" cried Mary, shuddering.

"It seems as if the rulers of the land knew little, and cared less about it," replied Mr. Bell. "The profoundly ignorant opinion that there is some connexion between our national prosperity, and the enormous fortunes amassed by some score of North-country manufacturers has, I believe, produced much of the lamentable non-interference of which the disinterested few complain, who are near enough to look upon the frightful game. Some individual voices have been most gloriously raised on this tremendous theme; and if they will be steadfast and enduring, they must and will prevail—for human nature, with all its vices, is not framed to look coldly on such horrors, and permit them. But the remedial process is

so slow—it is so difficult to arouse the attention, and awaken the feelings of busy men concerning things at a distance, whose connexion with all that they deem important they are too ignorant of, or too preoccupied to trace, that the keenest observers, and those who would the most deeply deprecate any remedy but a legal one, begin to fear that mercy will be clamoured for with very dangerous rudeness, before the parliament of England shall have roused up its wisdom to the task of affording it.”

“ And in what way, Mr. Bell, is it wished or hoped that the legislature should step forward to cure this dreadful evil? Is it proposed to abolish the use of machinery?”

Mr. Bell smiled, and shook his head.

“ You perhaps think,” said he, “ that there is a great disproportion between my strong sense of the vice and suffering produced by the factory system, and the measure for its mitigation to which I now limit almost my wishes. But it would be vain to look back to the time when steam-engines were not, and there would indeed be little wisdom in addressing our lamentations to their introduction. It is not the acquisition of any natural power, principle, or faculty that we should deplore: all such, on

the contrary, should be hailed as part and parcel of our magnificent birthright; and each new use we learn to make of the still much-unknown creation around us ought to be welcomed with a shout of praise, as a fresh fulfilment of the supreme command 'replenish the earth and *subdue* it.' It is not from increased, or increasing science that we have anything to dread, it is only from a fearfully culpable neglect of the moral power that should rule and regulate its uses, that it can be other than one of God's best gifts."

"But how," demanded Mary, "how, if machinery continues to be used, can any Act of Parliament prevent the necessity of employing children to wait upon its operations, instead of requiring the strength of men, as heretofore, to perform what the steam-engine does in their place?"

"No Act of Parliament can be conceived capable of inducing a manufacturer to employ the weaker, and at the same time the more costly agent, in preference to a more powerful and cheaper one," replied Mr. Bell. "No reasonable man would ask this, no reasonable man would desire it, and assuredly no reasonable man would attempt to enforce such an absurdity by law. 'No, Miss Brotherton, this

mighty power, as surely given for our use as is the innocent air that fans the woodbine yonder, has at length, after some few thousand of years careless overlooking on our part, been revealed to us. But let us not fly in the face of benignant nature, and say, like Caliban,

‘ You taught me language; and my profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse.’

If used aright, there cannot be a doubt that this magnificent power might, in all its agencies, be made the friend of man. It requires no great stretch of ingenuity to conceive that it might be rendered at once a source of still increasing wealth to the capitalist, and of lightened labour to the not-impoveryed operative. But that, as things are at present, this great discovery, and all the admirable ingenuity with which it is applied, acts as a ban, instead of a blessing, upon some hundred thousands of miserable victims is most true, while all the benefit that can be shown as a balance to this horror, is the bloated wealth of a small knot of master-manufacturers. But so monstrous is this evil, that its very atrocity inspires hope, from the improbability that when once, beyond all reach of contradiction, its existence shall be known by all men, it should be permitted to continue.”

"Then why is it not known?" demanded Mary, her colour heightened as she remembered her own entire ignorance upon the subject a few short weeks before: "surely it is the duty of all lookers-on to proclaim it to the whole world."

"Alas! Miss Brotherton, it is more easy to raise a voice, than to command attention to it. Loud and long must be the cry that shall awaken the indifferent, and rouse the indolent to action. But this loud, long cry will be uttered, and by the blessing of God it will be listened to at last."

"But tell me, Mr. Bell," resumed his deeply interested auditor, "what is this moderate enactment in mitigation of these wretched people's sufferings, which you say would content you?"

"All that we ask for," replied Mr. Bell, "all that the poor creatures ask for themselves, is that by Act of Parliament it should be rendered illegal for men, women, and children to be kept to the wearying, unhealthy labour of the mills for more than ten hours out of every day, leaving their daily wages at the same rate as now."

"And would *that* suffice," demanded Miss Brotherton with astonishment, "to effectually

relieve thé horrors you have been describing to me ?”

“ Miss Brotherton it would,” replied the clergyman. “ I would be loth to weary you with details,” he continued, “ but a few items may suffice to make you see how enormous are the benefits which would follow such an enactment. At present, if a large demand for manufactured goods arises, instead of being, as it ought, a blessing to the industrious hands that must supply it, it comes upon them as a fearful burden, threatening to crush the very springs of life in the little creatures that are chiefly to sustain it, while the golden harvest that it brings is not for them, but for their masters. For the miserable meed of an extra penny, or sometimes three-halfpence a-day, the young slaves (who, observe, have no power of choice, for if they, or their parents for them, refuse, they are instantly turned off to literal starvation—no parish assistance being allowed to those who resist the regulations of the manufacturers), for this wretched equivalent for health and joy, are compelled, whenever our boasted trade flows briskly, to stand to their work for just as many hours as the application of the overlooker’s strap, or billy-roller, can keep them on their legs. Innumerable in-

stances are on record of children falling from excess of weariness on the machinery, and being called to life by its lacerating their flesh. It continually happens that young creatures under fifteen years of age are kept from their beds all night. Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen hours of labour out of the twenty-four are cases which recur continually, and I need not say with what effect upon these victims of ferocious avarice. Now not only would all this be mended, the positive bodily torture spared, and as far as is consistent with constant indoor occupation, the health of the labourers preserved, were it made unlawful to keep them at positive labour for more than ten hours of every day; not only would all this follow from the enactment, but innumerable other advantages, some of them more important still, would, beyond all question, be its consequence. In the first place, were there no power of executing great and sudden orders by irregular exactions of labour, the recurrence of those fearful intervals when the starving operatives are thrown out of employ by the accidents which cause a deficiency in the demand would not happen—for in that case the capitalists would find themselves obliged to be beforehand with the demand, even though

some portion of their enormous wealth should for a time lie idle. From this would also follow the necessity of often employing adult hands, where now the cheaper labour of children, forced from their very vitals through the day and night, may be had for the sin of demanding it. Then would the unnatural spectacle of a stalwart father idly waiting to snatch the wages from the little feverish hand of his overlaboured child be seen no more. Then would there be strength and spirits left in the young to profit by the Sunday-schools now so often ostentatiously opened in vain, because the only way in which a little piecer can keep holiday is by lying throughout the day stretched upon his straw in heavy sleep. Then, too, the demoralizing process by which the heart of a mother is rendered hard as the nether mill-stone, by the necessity of goading her infants to their frightful toil, would cease. Boys and girls would no longer have to return to their homes at midnight—there would be time and inclination then, for those comfortable operations of the needle and the shears which

‘ Gars auld claes look amaist as weel’s the new.’

Then would not the disheartened ministers of God’s church strive in vain to make the reckless, joyless, worthless race listen to his words

of faith and hope. Then, Miss Brotherton, they would arise from that state of outcast degradation which has caused your friends to tell you that it would be 'unsafe, improper, and altogether wrong' for you, and such as you, to make personal acquaintance with them."

"And do you really think all this mighty this glorious good would follow from an enactment so moderate, so reasonable, so every way unobjectionable?"

"I have not the slightest shadow of a doubt, Miss Brotherton, that such good would follow it, and more, much more, than I have named—more than any one could believe or comprehend, who has not, like myself, been watching for years the misery, the vice, the degradation, which have resulted from the want of it."

"Then why, Mr. Bell, have not such representations been made to the legislature as must insure its immediate adoption?"

The good clergyman shook his head. "It is a most natural question, my dear young friend—allow me so to call you. All are my friends who feel upon this subject as you appear to do. It is a most natural and a most obvious question. Yet would my reply be anything rather than easy of comprehension were I to attempt to answer it directly. I sincerely

hope I shall converse with you again on this subject. Documents are not wanting, my dear Miss Brotherton, to prove that all, or nearly all, that private individuals can do, in the way of petition and remonstrance, has been already tried, nor are we yet without hope that good may come of it. But it must be long, and perhaps the longer the better, ere your young head and innocent heart can conceive our difficulties. You would hardly believe the ingenious devices to which frightened avarice can have recourse in order to retard, mutilate, and render abortive a measure having for its object a reduction of profits, with no equivalent save the beholding smiles instead of tears, and hearing the sounds of song and laughter instead of groans!"

"But while you are still waiting and hoping for this aid from our lawgivers," said Mary, "is there nothing that can be done in the interval to help all this misery, Mr. Bell?"

"Nothing effectual, my dear young lady," he replied mournfully. "I may, with no dishonest boasting say, that my life is spent in doing all I can to save these unhappy people from utter degradation and despair. But the oppression under which they groan is too overwhelming to be removed, or even lightened, by

any agency less powerful than that of the law. Nothing, in fact, can so clearly show the powerful oppression of the system as the total inefficiency of individual benevolence to heal the misery of those who suffer under it. Its power is stupendous, awful, terrible! Nature herself, elsewhere so omnipotent, here feels the strength of unchecked human wickedness, and seems to bend before it. For most certain is it, that in less than half a century, during which the present factory system has been in operation, the lineaments of the race involved in it are changed and deteriorated. The manufacturing population are of lesser and of weaker growth than their agricultural countrymen. The development of the intellectual faculties is obviously becoming weaker, and many who we have every reason to believe understand the physiology of man as thoroughly as science can teach it to them, do not scruple to assert, that if the present system continues, the race of English factory operatives will dwindle and sink in the strongly-graduated scale of human beings to something lower than the Esquimaux."

"Gracious Heaven!" cried Mary, clasping her hands with an emotion that almost amounted to agony, "and all these horrors

are perpetrated for the sake of making rich, needlessly, uselessly rich, a few obscure manufacturing families like my own ! This is very dreadful, sir," she continued, while tears burst from her eyes. " I have gained knowledge but not peace by my visit, and I must leave you with the sad conviction that the hope I had nourished of making my fortune useful to the suffering creatures among whom I live is vain and idle."

Mr. Bell listened to this melancholy assertion, and sighed because he could not contradict it. " Yes," said he, at length, " it is even so ; and if any proof were wanted of the depth and hopelessness of the wretchedness which the present system produces, it might be found in the fact, that despite the inclination I feel both for your sake, and that of the poor operatives, to encourage your generous benevolence, I cannot in conscience tell you that it is in your power effectually to assist them. That you may save your own excellent heart from the palsy of hopeless and helpless pity, by the indulgence of your benevolence in individual cases of distress, I need not point out to you ; but that any of the ordinary modes of being useful on a larger scale, such as organising schools, founding benefit societies, or the

like, could be of any use to beings so crushed, so toil-worn, and so degraded, it would be idle to hope."

Miss Brotherton now rose to depart—but as she extended her hand, and began to utter her farewell, it occurred to her that it was possible her new friend might, by conjecture at least, throw some light upon the destination of little Michael, and avoiding as much as possible the making any direct charge against her rich neighbour, she briefly narrated the facts of Michael's adoption, dismissal, and unknown destination, with little commentary on either, but concluded by saying,

"The mother of the child is in great anxiety about him, and though I cannot conceive it possible any harm can have befallen the boy, I am in some sort a fellow-sufferer with her in the anxiety which this mystery occasions, from having almost pledged myself to learn the place of his destination. Can you, dear sir, suggest to me any means by which this information can be obtained?"

"Some part of this history has reached us already," replied Mr. Bell. "It has been somewhat industriously bruited through the neighbourhood, that Sir Matthew Dowling, notoriously one of the most tyrannical millocrats in the whole district, has been moved to

kindness in behalf of some poor widow's son, and taken him to be reared and educated with his own children—I trust I am excusable, knowing what I know, for misdoubting the disinterested benevolence of any act of Sir Matthew Dowling's. Nevertheless it is certainly not easy to perceive why, after having so ostentatiously distinguished the boy, he should kidnap him, as it were, from his own house, in order to get rid of him. If, instead of being the object of especial favour, the little fellow had fallen under the rich knight's displeasure, Miss Brotherton, I should think it by no means improbable that he might have consigned him as an apprentice to some establishment, too notorious for its severity to make it desirable that his selection of it should be made known. But of this there seems neither proof nor likelihood."

Miss Brotherton turned pale as she listened to this suggestion. "Nay, but there is both truth and likelihood in such a suspicion," she exclaimed with considerable emotion, and after a moment's consideration, added, "I know no reason why I should conceal the cause I have for saying so—if you know not all, how can you give me counsel?"

Hurriedly, and as briefly as possible, Miss Brotherton then recounted the scene she had

witnessed in the green-room of the Dowling-lodge theatricals; but there was an unconscious and involuntary fervour in her manner of narrating it, which rendered it impossible to listen with indifference, or not to feel at the recital some portion of the indignation she had felt when it occurred.

"It must be looked to, Miss Brotherton," replied her warm-hearted new acquaintance. "The boy must be traced, tracked, found, and rescued. I think there are few of these wretched prison-houses of whose existence I am ignorant, and it is probable I may be able to help you in this. Should I obtain any hint likely to be useful in the search, I will call upon you, if you will give me leave, to communicate it."

Most earnestly and truly did the heiress assure him that it was impossible she could receive a visit more calculated to give her pleasure; adding, that whether the hint were obtained or not, she trusted the acquaintance she had so unceremoniously begun would not drop here, and that, by returning her visit, he would prove to her that he was not displeased by it.

It rarely happens between right-hearted people who meet for the first time, if one of

the parties conceive a liking for the other, that it fails to prove mutual; and it was with a cordial sincerity, as genuine as her own, that Mr. Bell expressed his hope that their acquaintance would ripen into friendship.

Too intently occupied by all that had passed to remember her own arrangements, Mary forgot that her carriage was not at the door, and while these parting words were exchanged, walked forth, expecting to find it. It was Mrs. Tremlett who first recollected that the coachman had been ordered to put up his horses at the nearest inn, but this was not till they had traversed the little garden, and were already in the lane; for though the good nurse had been little more than *personnage muet* during the foregoing scene, she had taken a deep interest in it, and it was much with the air of one awaking from a dream, that she said, "My dear Miss Mary! you have forgot that the carriage is sent away."

"Indeed have I!" said Mary, laughing, "and no wonder. But there stands our faithful William, he will tell us in what direction we may find it."

"Will you not return, Miss Brotherton, while it is made ready?" said the clergyman.

"Not if you will walk on with us, dear sir."

The evening is delightful, but already quite far enough advanced to make it prudent not to lose any time." And having given orders that the carriage was to follow, they strolled on towards the turnpike.

"There," said Mr. Bell, pointing to the towering chimneys of a large factory at some distance, "there, Miss Brotherton, is an establishment where, though carding and spinning go on within the walls, and some hundreds of children and young girls are employed in attending the machinery that performs the process, the voice of misery is never heard, for there the love of gold is chained and held captive by religion and humanity."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mary, as she looked at the sinless monster to which he pointed. "It is not of necessity, then, that this dangerous trade is fatal to all employed in it?"

"Certainly not. Were but its labours restricted, both for young and old, to ten hours a day, there is no reason on earth why it should not be carried on with comfort and advantage to every individual concerned in it, and with credit, honour, and prosperity to the country. But you can hardly guess what up-hill work it is, when one good man has got to stand

alone, and breast the competition of a whole host of bad ones in his commercial enterprises. The high-minded owners of yonder factory are losing thousands every year by their efforts to purify this traffic of its enormities—and some thousand small still voices call down blessings on them for it. But while it costs them ten shillings to produce what their neighbours can bring into the market for nine, they will only be pointed at as pitifully unwise in their generation by all the great family of Mammon which surrounds them. Few, alas! will think of following the example! All they can do therefore is in fact but to carry on a system of private charity on an enormous scale—but till they are supported by law, even their vast efforts and most noble sacrifices can do nothing towards the general redemption of our poor northern people from the state of slavery into which they have fallen. And yet I do believe, Miss Brotherton," he continued, after a pause, "I do most truly believe that these greedy tyrants would fail more rarely than now they do in their efforts to realize enormous wealth, if the system were to undergo exactly the change we ask for. The plan of under-selling may indeed in some few instances enable a very lucky man to run

up a blood-stained fortune ; and blood-stained it must be, for whenever this method of commanding a sale is pursued, and ruin does NOT ensue, it is demonstrable that the bones and marrow of children, working unlimited hours, must have been the main agent in the operation. But it is quite certain that the underselling system must upon the long run be ruinous. If all the losses upon our production were fairly set against all the gains from the immoderate working of young hands, the slavery scheme would appear as little profitable as holy. But here is your carriage, my dear young lady !—God bless you ! and may we live to rejoice together over an effectual legislative remedy for the evils we have passed this our first interview in deploring !”

So saying, he extended his hand to assist her into the carriage which had already drawn up beside them—but Miss Brotherton stepped aside while he performed this office to her friend, and then laying her hand on his arm, drew him back a step or two to the spot from whence the factory chimneys he had pointed out to her were visible.

“ Tell me, before we part,” she said, “ the names of those to whom that building belongs ?”

"WOOD AND WALKER," replied the clergyman.

"Thank you!" she replied; "I shall never hear those names without breathing a blessing on them!"

Friendly farewells were once more exchanged, and the meditative heiress was driven back to Millford Park in silence so profound, that her old friend believed her to be asleep, and carefully abstained from any movement that might awaken her. But Mary Brotherton was not asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

Trade in a flourishing state—The benefits conferred thereby to those employed in it—The natural logic of Religion—Its fallibility when put to the test.

THE moment at which Michael Armstrong entered the cotton mill at Deep Valley was a critical one. The summer had been more than commonly sultry, and a large order had kept all hands very sharply at work. Even at dead of night the machinery was never stopped, and when one set of fainting children were dragged from the mules another set were dragged from the reeking beds they were about to occupy, in order to take their places. The ventilation throughout the whole fabric was exceedingly imperfect; the heat, particularly in the rooms immediately beneath the roof, frightfully intense; cleanliness as to the beds, the floors, and the walls, utterly neglected; and even the persons of the children permitted to be filthy to excess, from having no soap allowed to assist their ablutions—though from

the greasy nature of their employment it was peculiarly required, while the coarse meal occasionally given out to supply its place was invariably swallowed, being far too precious in the eyes of the hungry children to be applied to the purpose for which it was designed. In addition to all this, the food was miserably scanty, and of a nature so totally unfit to sustain the strength of growing children thus severely worked, that within a fortnight after Michael's arrival, an epidemic fever of a very alarming description began to show itself. But it had made considerable progress, before the presence of this new horror was revealed to him.

Notwithstanding all the hardships of Brookford factory, no infectious disease had ever appeared there, which it is possible might have been owing to the fact that the majority of the labourers in it lived at a considerable distance, thus ensuring to them a walk morning and night, through the fresh air. This, though it added to their daily fatigue, probably lessened the danger of it, while the wretched hovels to which they returned for their short night's rest, miserable shelters as they were, reeked not with the congregated effluvia of fifty uncleansed sleepers in one

chamber ! Michael, therefore, had never before witnessed the hideous approach of contagion. The general appearance too of the Deep-Valley troop was so far from healthy, that the sickly aspect of those first seized upon was less remarkable than it would have been elsewhere. Thus another week wore away, during which, though several of those who had been working when it began were withdrawn, and known to be in the sick-ward ere it closed, the fact that an infectious fever was among them had not yet got wind.

“ Poor dear Betsy Price ! ” whispered Fanny Fletcher to her friend Michael, as they sat side by side at their miserable dinner one day. “ I heard missis tell master that she was dead. But I am trying to be glad for it, Michael.”

“ Glad, Fanny ? ” replied the boy : “ you told me once that you liked her more than any other girl in the mill, and now you are glad she is dead ! ”

“ I am not so glad as I think I ought to be,” returned Fanny gently. “ She will not be hungry in heaven, Michael, nor will she work till she is ready to fall ; and surely God will give us green fields and sweet fresh air in heaven ; and there must be flowers, Michael. Oh ! I am quite sure of that ; and Betsy Price will

have it all! Ought I not to be very, very glad?"

Michael looked in her sweet, innocent face, as she said this, and tears filled his eyes.

"And if you die, Fanny, must I be glad too?"

"If you thought about heaven as I do, and if you loved me very much indeed," replied the little girl, "I can't tell how you could help being glad."

"But I do love you very much indeed," said Michael, almost choked by his efforts not to cry, "and I do think of heaven, too, Fanny, but I couldn't be glad if you was to die!"

"Not when you hear that, Michael!" said Fanny, starting up as the lash of the governor's whip resounded through the room as a signal that their numbered moments of rest were over. "I suppose, then, I love you better than you love me, for I could not help being glad if I knew that you would never hear nor feel that lash again!"

When they met again at supper, Michael, though still unsuspecting of the cause, missed three more children from their places. He fancied, too, that there was something new and strange in the aspect of their hard-featured female tyrant: she was paler than usual, scolded

not at all, and when she spoke to her husband, it was in a voice that hardly exceeded a whisper. Yet, notwithstanding this, some young ears again caught words that told of death. Yet still the mill worked on, and nothing seemed to mark that any calamity more than usual had got among them.

By degrees, however, the growing pestilence burst forth, as it were, before the eyes of the terrified children, and they knew that the grave yawned before them all. Then it was that the ghastly countenances of each doomed victim struck dismay into the hearts of their companions even before they were permitted to leave their labour, and sink down to the rest that should be disturbed no more. But still the mill went on, for Mr. Elgood Sharpton had just received a glorious order from Russia, and it would have been perfect madness, as this gentleman was heard to remark to his eldest son, if a death or two among the apprentice children was to check the mill at such a time as that.

So the mill went on, and death went on too. But as it is considered by all parties concerned to be extremely important that the cry of epidemic contagion should not be raised in the neighbourhood of a factory under these circum-

stances, it was deemed best by Mr. Elgood Sharpton, and his confidential managers, not to call in medical assistance.

"For, first and foremost, Poulet," said the experienced proprietor to the governor of the apprentice-house, "first and foremost, it is of no manner of use. I never knew any proper, regular contagious fever in my life, that could be stopped short by a doctor. You must take care of yourself and your wife, of course, and I will see that you have a hamper of good old port sent in, and mind that you both of you take two glasses a day each, Poulet—one before you go into the rooms in the morning, and the other after you have seen them all down for the night, and we must order in a cask of vinegar to sprinkle the chambers. Trust me that this will do more good than all the doctors that ever were hatched. Besides the vinegar cask will never sing out you know, Poulet, and the doctor might."

To this reasoning and to these arrangements no objection whatever was made by the governor of the apprentice-house. Of athletic frame, and iron nerves, he grinned defiance at any danger that threatened his own person, rightly enough thinking, perhaps, that any disease to which his water-porridge-fed troop

appeared peculiarly liable would be little likely to attack himself.

It was, however, not the least part of his wisdom upon this occasion, that he systematically paid as little attention to what was going on round him as possible. Had he made it a habit to look into the haggard faces of the drooping children, as one after another they pined, languished, and sunk, first into the horrible abyss of wretchedness called the sickward, and then into the grave, it is possible that he too might in some degree have been shaken. As it was, however, he went on so cleverly supplying the missing hands by recommending to the manager that one healthy child should do the work of two, and so cleverly, also, getting all that died by day buried by night, without making, as he said, any fuss or fidget about it whatever, that Mr. Elgood Sharpton felt him to be eminently deserving of an especial reward, and when fifteen children had been noiselessly buried, in Tugswell churchyard, he presented him with a Bank of England note for ten pounds, as a testimony of his esteem and gratitude for his very exemplary and praiseworthy behaviour. It fared not quite so well, however, with his wife. Whether it were that the poco-curante system

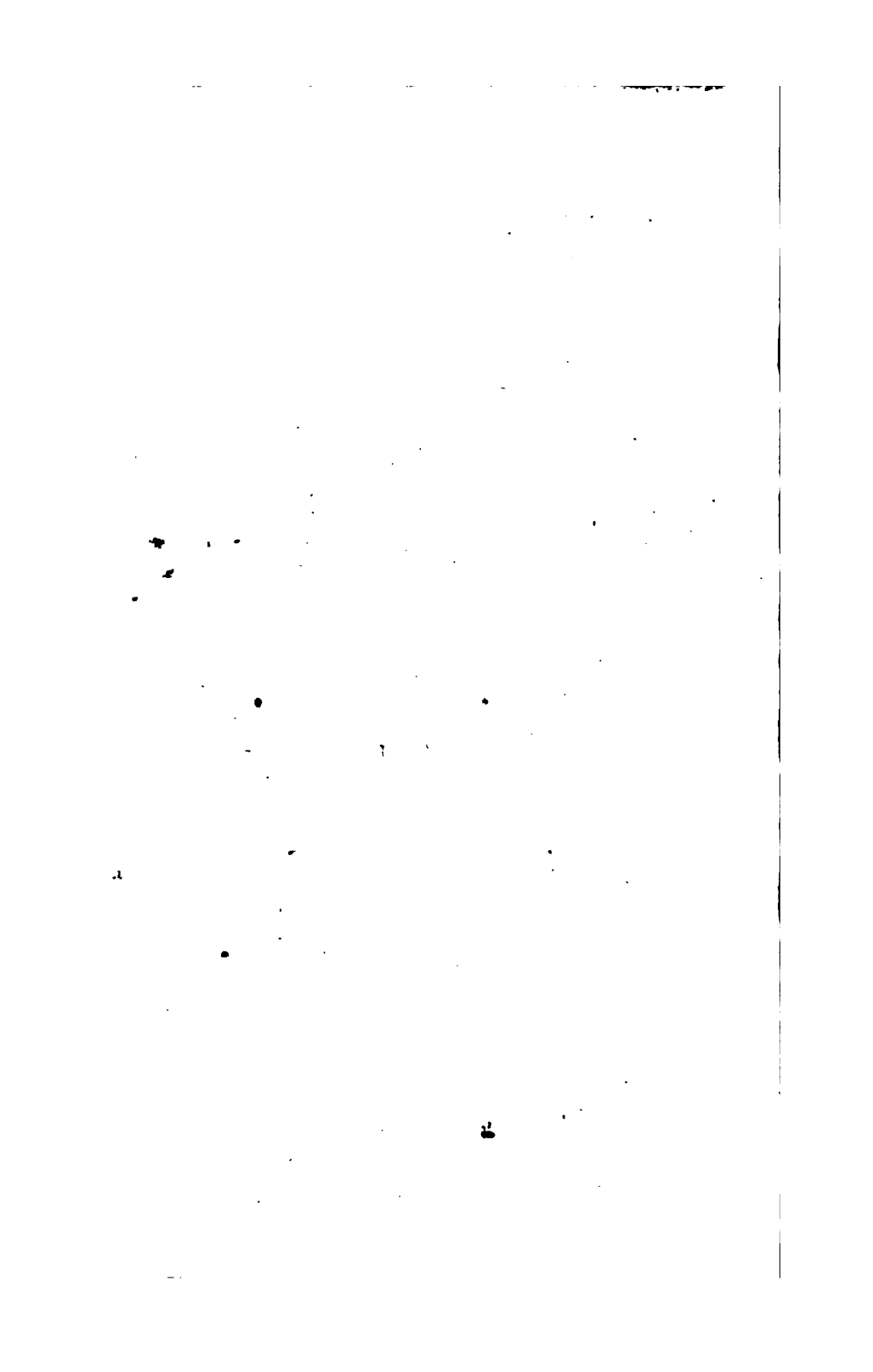
was less within reach of her position than of his ; or that her frame was less stoutly proof against the malaria with which she was surrounded, a visible change came over her about three weeks after this visitation had been first felt at the Deep-Valley mills. Strong in constitution, and athletic in form, it seemed, however, no easy matter for disease itself to conquer her. The large dark eye grew dim, and sunk back behind her high cheek-bones by degrees. Her coarse, firm-set features appeared to relax, and her active limbs to languish, for two whole days before she yielded herself to the invincible power that had seized upon her.

It happened during this interval that Fanny Fletcher and Michael, in their eagerness to communicate to each other their observations on the rapidly-increasing sickness of their fellow-labourers, hung back together, as the frightened train swept on before the lifted lash of the governor, and permitted nearly all their companions to reach the mill ere they had left the supper-room. They were perhaps themselves unconscious how much they were emboldened to this hardy defiance of a standing law by the unwonted stillness of tongue and tameness of aspect observable in Mrs. Poulet. But if they fancied they were to escape entirely



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Mrs. Brotherton held half a sovereign between her
fingers & her thumb. "I will give you this" she said.



they were mistaken, for whilst the little girl was telling Michael that they ought always, at work, or not at work, to be thinking of God, who was perhaps thinking of them, and meaning to take them both up together to his own happy heaven, just as she had laid her hand on his to enforce her words, and looking wistfully in his face pronounced aloud, "Do, Michael, do!" the sick dragon stepped back on hearing them, from the passage that led into the kitchen, and turning her ghastly face full upon them, exclaimed, while her languid fist strove in vain to clench and raise itself, as in days of yore to threaten castigation,—

"Do! you devil's imps! I'll do ye! Off to your mules or by—" But ere she could finish the sentence, her fever-laden sinews relaxed, and seizing upon the long table for support she sank almost insensible upon a bench.

Greatly terrified, both Michael and Fanny screamed together, but they screamed in vain. There was no longer any one within hearing, save in the closely packed chamber above, where more than twenty sick children lay two and two together, in their miserable beds, but totally without nurses or attendants of any kind, so that their loud cries, though heard by many, brought assistance from none.

"Oh! Michael! Michael! she'll die too!" said Fanny shuddering. "I would make her live longer if I could. She is not fit to die. Go to the pump, Michael, and fetch water! Go, go, dear boy! We must not leave her this way!"

The little girl endeavoured to raise the woman's head which had sunk upon the table, but the effort was beyond her strength, and feeling after a moment's reflection that the best manner of assisting her would be to call others she cried, "No, no! don't go, Michael! Don't go for the water. It is no use my trying to hold her up, and besides we don't know if it is good for her or not. Oh dear! how dreadful bad she looks. Let us run away to the mill, Michael, and tell the master."

The seizure of Mrs. Poulet, unlike every other, became, within an hour, from the time it was known, the theme of every tongue throughout the whole establishment. Had it been Mr. Elgood Sharpton himself it could not well have occasioned a greater sensation. The effect this produced throughout the sickly troop might have served as a proof of the wisdom of a government when it conceals the mischief it has brought upon an empire, from those who are likely to discuss it. The total

silence which till now had been preserved among the managers and overlookers respecting the contagious nature of the malady which had got among the children, the absence of all medical attendance, and of all precautionary or medical measures in any way calculated to excite attention, had hitherto very successfully prevented rumour from doing her usual work on such occasions; and it is probable that this partial ignorance of their own danger considerably lessened its consequences; for it was only one or two such thoughtful, meditative little things as Fanny Fletcher, who had begun to remember having heard of infectious fevers, and to think that maybe it was something of that sort that had made Nos. 9 16, 18, 19, &c. &c., stay away so long, and that, too, when the mill was so very busy.

But when it became generally known that the awful strength of Mrs. Poulet was laid low, and when the words, "The fever have caught her!" had once been pronounced aloud, the palpable image of the pale tyrant seemed to stand frowning in the midst of them, substituting his grisly hour-glass and scythe for the fist and the frown he had conquered.

The scene which followed this was very frightful. Those upon whom infection had

seized sunk from their work at once, despite the goading thong which had hitherto kept them from dropping—as the spur and lash sustain the failing post-horse,—while those who were yet untouched looked in each other's faces as if to watch who next should fall. When the children from all the different floors of the fabric met together at their midday meal, the first thought of each seemed to be the finding out who was missing since last they assembled, and the shudder that followed the perceiving another, and another, and another gone, ran along the shortening lines with an agony which grew more and more intense as their numbers lessened.

When things had reached this state, Mr. Elgood Sharpton agreed with Mr. Poulet that it might perhaps be as well to let an apothecary from Tugswell visit the factory, to which reluctant decision two reasons strongly contributed. The first was, that though with his usual forethought he had divided his nocturnal burials between the churchyards of Tugswell and Meddington, the clergyman of both had declared that their frequency rendered it necessary that some inquiry should be made into the cause of so great a mortality; and the second was that the fact of the mistress

of the apprentice-house being herself at the point of death from the same malady must infallibly prove to the medical visitant that it was no treatment peculiar to the children which had occasioned it, but that it had come, beyond all possibility of contradiction, by the visitation of God.

Nevertheless the medical gentleman ventured to declare that nothing would be so likely to stop the contagion as nourishing food ; upon which the terrified manufacturer astonished all the butchers within his reach, by commanding a large supply of beef and mutton "*good enough to make wholesome soup*," and before another ghastly week had passed away, the wisdom of this prescription became so evident that, when settling accounts together at the end of it, Mr. Poulet hinted to his employer that he did not feel quite sure whether upon the whole a *little* better living for the apprentices might not pay.

For an answer Mr. Elgood Sharpton put his finger to the sum total for provisions during the last week, and then, turning back a page or two of the huge volume, did the same by the sum total of a former week.

["True, sir, true enough," said Mr. Poulet, "but howsomever it can't be denied that if we

go on in this fashion we shall have no hands left to work with—and there would be but small profit in that, sir.”

“My dear Poulet, you do not study the population returns as attentively as I do,” replied his enlightened master. “Just at this moment it may be very right to cram them for several reasons—the best being, observe, that by so doing we stop more mouths than their own. But as to going on in the same style of expense when this fit of dying and gossiping is over, it is quite out of the question, and I do beg that you will never mention the subject to me again. You can know little, my good Poulet, of the rate at which pauper children are multiplied, if you think it necessary to preserve them at this ruinous rate of expense. If there were all of them to die off before the end of the month, I would undertake to have their place supplied before the end of the next. You may take my word for it that no man ever succeeded in business who did not know how to make out an accurate balance between profit and loss. I know to a fraction what each of these ’prentice brats are worth, Poulet, and I can tell you that such weekly bills as these would speedily turn the tables against us.”

“In that case, sir, there is surely no more to

be said," replied Poulet ; and then changing the subject, he added, " In course, sir, you won't object to my missis being buried by day, instead of by night ? Besides respect to her, sir, I think it would be quite as well showing all the country, you see, as how flesh is but grass for the high, as for the low, and making it manifest to all the country that it can't be no want of good nursing and comfort as causes the deaths at our mill."

" Quite right, quite right, Poulet," replied the rapid-minded Mr. Sharpton, promptly ; " I should not object even to stopping the mills for a couple of hours or so, and making all the hands follow as mourners, if you thought it would answer."

" Why, as to that, sir," said the faithful servant, " I would not undertake to say that we should be able to get up much of a procession if we turned out the whole lot to choose from. They couldn't stand, I should think, sir, without the mules to hold by, for so long together. They totter frightful, I can tell you, when they starts first to move to and fro, from factory to 'prentice-house, and back again ; and I don't think there would be either credit or profit in making a show of them."

" Well, well, do as you will, Poulet. I

don't care a brass farthing whether they walk or stand; and I can't say, when I built this factory, it was with any view to make a show, as you call it, of the young ladies and gentlemen to be employed in it."

With a light laugh which challenged an answering laugh from the governor, widower as he was, Mr. Elgood Sharpton rose to depart. Poulet attended him to the outer gate, and held his stirrup while he mounted, reiterating his promises to do the best he could, and only stipulating for plenty of vinegar, and leave to use soap till the cold weather came in.

Meanwhile, though a less proportion died of those who were seized with the malady, than before the improvement in the diet was introduced, the plague was as yet very far from being stayed. No day passed without many fresh victims sinking under its influence, and it was no uncommon thing to see two or three wheelbarrows at a time, towards the evening of every day, conveying children from the factory to the apprentice-house who had fallen while following the machinery.

For a whole week after the death of Mrs. Poulet, Michael and his friend Fanny both continued, as it seemed, unscathed; and many were the grave discussions between them, as

to whether they ought to be sorry or glad that they were so—Fanny very steadily adhering to her first opinion, that if they had a great deal of love for each other, they would not let themselves be sorry, if one saw the other go away ; and Michael as steadily persisting that right or wrong he must be so very sorry if Fanny went, as not to care at all how soon he followed after.

The disinterested reasonings of the little girl were soon put to the proof. Michael looked so very ill one morning at breakfast, that even the iron-hearted Poulet told him he had best mount to the sick ward before it was needful to carry him ; but Michael looked at poor Fanny, and saw such an expression of terror and misery in her countenance, that he could not help thinking she would change her mind about being glad, if he did not go in to work along with her. So he told the governor that he wasn't bad at all, and had rather work than not ; an assurance, which it could not, under any circumstances, be Mr. Poulet's duty to combat ; and accordingly Michael got to his place in the mill, and spoke cheeringly to Fanny as he went along. But before the hour of dinner he was on the floor, and when the over-looker called to a stretcher to have him wheel-

barrowed back to the 'prentice-house, Fanny Fletcher thought that she certainly did not love poor Michael Armstrong so much as she fancied she did, for that, if the choice had been given her, she would a great deal rather have been taken ill herself. And spite of a strap that she saw coming towards her, and flourishing ready for duty in the air, she helped to drag the unresisting body of her poor companion from before the mules, and, thoughtless and reckless of the consequences, sat down and held his head on her knee, till he was raised in the arms of the stretcher and carried off. It was then, and not till then, that her tears began to flow, and they flowed so fast, that she could no longer see the uplifted strap, nor was it till the blow had descended sharply on her arm that she was sufficiently mistress of her thoughts to remember that there was at any rate a hope that it might be her turn next; and with this to comfort her, she yielded meekly to the arm that pushed her to her usual place, and resumed her occupation with more stedfast courage than at that moment any other hope could have given her.

But even this sad hope proved vain. Fanny Fletcher still continued one of the very few upon whom the contagion had no effect. For

the first day or two after the removal of her friend, her mind was almost wholly occupied by the expectation of feeling the same symptoms that she had witnessed in him ; and when these came not, her thoughts reverted to the possibility of his recovering and coming again to work near her.

It was an established custom, among those who alone could give information on the subject, never to permit any questionings concerning the sick, or, if they were boldly hazarded, to give no other reply than a rebuke. So that day after day and week after week elapsed, without her being at all able to guess whether Michael were dead or alive. By degrees, however, all hope of seeing him return faded from her mind ; and then, poor little girl, she found out that people can't always wish truly and really for what they know to be best either for themselves or others. And day by day, though still the fever touched her not, she grew more pale, more thin, more melancholy. Now and then, indeed, it still occurred to her as possible that Michael might reappear again, as many had done after many days of sickness ; but, alas ! none had ever stayed away so long as he had done ! She had questioned many who had been ill concerning him, but none seemed to

know or care anything about those who had shared the sick chamber with them ; till at length, a boy to whom she had often addressed these questions, because she happened to know that he had been taken to the sick ward on the same day as Michael, replied as if by a sudden effort of recollection,

“ Oh ! that chap ? Him what was one of the last as come ? Ay, ay, I mind all about him. He was dead and buried before he had been down three days.”

Fanny Fletcher asked no more questions, nor had she any longer hope of following where so many of her happier companions were gone. The fever was pronounced to be over, the factory and apprentice-house were white-washed, and a number of new inmates arrived. All things in short at the Deep-Valley Mills appeared to be going on as prosperously as usual ; a statement which could be hardly impeached by the fact that one little girl there was growing paler and more shadow-like every day.

CHAPTER X.

Miss Brotherton exerts her eloquence, and Nurse Tremlett is brought to reason thereby—The Heiress hardens her heart, and speaks harsh truths to Martha Dowling, but all in vain—She conceives a project, and sets about putting it in execution with great spirit.

“WELL, my dear Mary,” said Mrs. Tremlett, on sitting down *tête-à-tête* with Miss Brotherton, after their return from Fairly, “don’t you think that you will come at last to confess that I was right when I told you that you had better let things alone, and not attempt to make any fuss or stir about these factory goings on?”

Mary looked sick at heart, and only shook her head in reply.

“Why, what have you gained, my dear child, by all your labour and pains to get information, as you call it? You are looking as white as a sheet—your eyes are sunk in your head—when I look at you, instead of the smiles you used to give me, I get nothing but sighs, and all for what? Can you in honesty and truth say that you have gained anything worth knowing by following your own opinion instead of mine? What good in the world can you do, dear, by

listening to all the shocking stories that clergyman there told you? I dare say he is a very good man, and he looks like it, but upon my word I think he is doing nothing but just wasting his time, as well as yourself: for though I sat and said nothing, as of course it was my place to do, I listened to every word; and it is just because I believe every word was true, that common sense makes me see there's no good to talk about it. Indeed, and indeed, my darling, I would not make free to talk to you in this way, which looks for all the world as if I was taking advantage of your goodness to me, if I did not see that you was going the way to torment yourself for everlasting, without doing one bit of good to any one. For how, my dear, can you, or that good clergyman either, hope to put down all the wicked doings he told about? And to be sure he said as much himself—didn't he, Miss Mary? Then do make up your mind to be quiet and happy, and let things that you can't mend alone. Put as many children to school as you like, my dear, and you may give them a pretty neat uniform, you know, and that will be a pleasure for you to think about, and to look at; but, for pity's sake, my dear, dear child! give up at once, and for

ever, this bothering yourself for everlasting about the factories, which you can no more stop, Mary, than you can stop the sun from rising in the morning, and setting at night."

Here the good woman ceased, and looked with some anxiety in the thoughtful eyes of her young mistress. She felt that she did not understand their expression, and no wonder, for Mary Brotherton herself sat silently doubting how she should answer her. A languid feeling, proceeding partly from fatigue and indisposition, and partly from the discouraging conviction that she had no very satisfactory arguments by which to rebut her old friend's charge of useless devotion to a hopeless cause, made her for some minutes unwilling to speak at all. Then came a somewhat peevish wish to interdict for ever the discussion of the subject between them; but as she raised her eyes to utter it, she encountered a look of such humble love, deprecating her displeasure, yet fondly clinging to the freedom which risked the incurring it, that her purpose suddenly changed, and instead of the chilling command she was meditating, she threw her arms round the old woman's neck, exclaiming,

"Oh, my dear nurse! How much, how very much you must love me! since care for my al-

ready too-much-cared-for peace and quiet can harden such a heart as yours towards all the sufferings we have this day heard recounted !”

“Thank God ! you are not angry,” cried the affectionate old woman kissing her ; and then arranging the neglected ringlets of her pretty charge, and looking cheerily in her face, she said, “ Now then, Mary, I won’t teaze you any more about it. You are so sweet and so gentle to me, that I am quite sure you will not long think my heart *is* hard ; and then by degrees you will find out that I am right ; and then all will go well again, and I shall see my dear girl look like herself once more.”

“ Nurse Tremlett ! the time is already come when the impossibility of my efforts being of any avail to stem the torrent with which avarice and cruelty are overwhelming the land is made evident to me. So much, dear nurse, I concede to you, and therefore on that point we will argue no more. But, my dear old woman, have patience with me if I tell you that there are some points on which my reading may have given me, young as I am, as much, or even more information than your experience has given you. You have heard of the slave-trade, nurse Tremlett—you have heard more than one excellent charity sermon preached in aid

of the funds that were to assist in freeing these poor helpless black people from the tyranny of their masters, and I suppose you know that it is now unlawful to buy and sell these poor creatures. And how do you think this happy change in their favour has been brought about?"

"By the king and the parliament, Miss Mary, making that most good and righteous law," replied nurse Tremlett.

"And how were they persuaded to make that law, think you?" demanded Mary.

"I can't tell how that was brought about, my dear. I suppose it was because they saw that it was right and fit."

"It was brought about, nurse Tremlett, by the voices of the people of England, which were for years raised quietly, and with no breach of law or order, but with patient and unshrinking perseverance against this great sin, till the lengthened cry could be no longer resisted, and the law they perseveringly asked for was granted to them. Do you think, nurse Tremlett, that if, during these years of orderly, but steady remonstrance, every English man and woman had acted upon the principle you recommend, and had turned their thoughts and their conversation from the subject of negro slavery, because each one knew

that he or she individually possessed no power to stop it—do you think that if such had been the system acted upon, England would now have to boast of having abolished this most wicked traffic?”

“Perhaps not, my dear. I think I understand you now,” replied the honest-hearted old woman, eagerly.

“Then now, my dear old friend, we shall, I think, never have any more disputes upon this subject. You—I—every servant in my house—every acquaintance I have in the world, may aid and assist in putting an end to this most atrocious factory system, WHICH OUGHT TO WEIGH HEAVIER UPON EVERY CHRISTIAN ENGLISH HEART THAN EVER THE SLAVE-TRADE DID. If the whole British empire, nurse, did but know what we are about here—if the facts we heard from Mr. Bell to-day were but impressed upon the minds of all my fellow-subjects as they are on mine, the horrors he detailed would cease before another year was come and gone.”

“God forbid then, my sweet child, that I should ever more raise my sinful voice to drown your righteous one. I have been a vain, self-sufficient old woman, my dear Mary, and clearly have been talking a great deal about that of which I know nothing. Only don't think I

am cruel and hard-hearted ; for though I do—as you truly say—though I do love you very much indeed, I am not such a wretch as to hear all we were told to-day without wishing to mend it.”

This was the last time Mary Brotherton had to do battle with her nurse on the subject of the factory system. Once awakened to a sense of its tyranny and injustice, and made to feel that the only hope of remedy lay in the possibility of universally raising British feeling against it, there was no danger that the right-hearted old woman would ever again turn with indifference, weariness, or displeasure from the theme. Her young mistress felt that she had touched the right string, and that she should never again have to fear discord where it was so essential to her comfort to find harmony. This change was really a comfort, and she felt it to be so, removing as it did one irksome feature from her situation, and for a few minutes it cheered her, and she said so, cordially ; but the next, a pang shot to her heart, as she remembered that this assurance of accordant counsels with her venerable nurse could avail her nothing in the most painful of all her difficulties, for it promised no help either in obtaining light upon the mystery of poor Mi-

chael's abode, or in the still more pressing embarrassment of confessing to his unhappy mother and brother the impossibility of obtaining it. Yet this painful task must be performed, and that without delay, for well she knew that every hour that passed without their seeing her would be rendered dreadful, both by the agony of fear, and the sickening hot and cold fits of uncertainty. But never had she felt herself so very a coward as while meditating this visit of the morrow. She saw in imagination the eager questioning of Edward's speaking eyes, and the heavy glance of his mother, anticipating the worst she had to tell.

Sometimes she thought she would await the coming of the boy to take his place in the school, and let him report the failure of all her inquiries to the poor widow. But there was a selfish cowardice in this which instantly struck her, and she seemed to hate herself for the suggestion. For above an hour after she had laid her head upon her pillow these thoughts kept her painfully awake, and it was only after deciding that she would once more see Martha Dowling, and try the effect of repeating to her, but without quoting the authority, the dark hints she had listened to, respecting Sir Matthew's possible motives—it was only when

her restless thoughts had fixed themselves on this, that she at length closed her aching eyes in sleep.

Above an hour before the usual hour of rising, Mary Brotherton was already at her writing-desk. The idea of going to Dowling Lodge, and encountering the knight and his family, was intolerable, and she had therefore recourse to her pen as the means of obtaining the interview she wished for, without paying for it the penalty of such a visit. She wrote as follows :—

“ My dear Miss Martha,

“ I trust you are too goodnatured to be angry with me even if you should think that I am taking a great liberty with you. But the truth is, that I much wish for the pleasure of seeing you ; and yet am too idle this morning to venture upon a drive. Will you, then, have the great kindness to pass the morning with me here ? I send my carriage, lest Lady Dowling should not have one at leisure to send with you.

“ Believe me, my dear Miss Martha,

“ Yours very sincerely,

“ MARY BROTHERTON.”

Having written, folded, and sealed this epistle, Mary recollected that it would be im-

possible to send it for at least four hours, and she smiled at first, and then sighed, as she thought of the restless but useless activity which had caused her so needlessly to forestall her usual hour of rising. It would, in truth, have been better for her, poor girl, could she have slept through the time, for her waking thoughts had little that was pleasant to rest upon. Even the commencement of Edward's studies, to which she had before looked forward with great delight, now recurred to her only to bring the recollection that, if she saw him, his thoughts would be neither of his new clothes nor his new books, but of Michael, and of her promise to get tidings of him. For his sake, and her own too, she determined at least to escape this interview, feeling that it would be better for all parties that no tidings should be delivered to both mother and son at once, which could be done after his school hours, by her driving to Hoxley-lane, after she had taken Martha home.

In pursuance of this resolution, she walked to the school-house, renewed her orders that the greatest attention should be paid to the new scholar, Edward Armstrong, and care taken that, if he were found backward for his age, he should neither be laughed at nor chided. She then left a message for him, stating that

she should be engaged all the morning, but would see him at his mother's house, after he left school.

At eleven o'clock Miss Brotherton's equipage set off for Dowling Lodge, bearing her letter to Martha, and the interval till its return was an anxious one. First she felt doubtful if her unusual invitation would be excepted; and if it were, she felt more doubtful still as to the nature of the scene which must follow. Nothing short of her earnest wish to redeem her promise to Mrs. Armstrong could have given Mary courage to do what she now meditated.

She entertained not the slightest doubt of the intrinsic excellence of Martha Dowling. All she had ever seen of her, and still more, all she had heard from the Armstrongs, convinced her of this; and to pain her, therefore, particularly in that most tender point, the exposure of her father, the tremendous effect of which upon her Mary had already witnessed, was one of the very last measures she could have been led to adopt. But a strong and stern feeling of justice urged her not to shrink from this. It was evident, from the statement of Mrs. Armstrong, that Martha had been actively instrumental in sending Michael to his present destination, let it be where it might;

and painful or not painful, it was unquestionably right to make her understand the doubts that existed as to the boy's well-being, in order that she might avail herself, as she was bound to do, of her access to the only person who could explain the transaction.

Having screwed her courage, therefore, to the strictness of examination necessary to her most righteous purpose, Mary left her boudoir in the possession of Mrs. Tremlett, and repaired to the library to await her guest. Nor did she wait long. Almost before the time arrived at which she had calculated that the carriage might return, the great house-bell gave signal of a visiter, and the next moment Martha Dowling stood before her.

The two young girls shook hands, and each observed that the other looked paler than she was wont to do. The heart of Mary sank within her as she marked the expression of Martha's countenance. Not only was it pale, but most speakingly anxious, and, in addition to her usual shy and reserved manner, there was an appearance of uneasiness, and almost of fear, as she thought, which seemed to tell that her object was suspected. Nor was she wrong. In pursuance of a promise given to Michael, Martha had visited the widow Armstrong, and the intense anxiety under which she found her

suffering respecting the destination of her boy awakened for the first time in her own mind a shadowy suspicion that all might not be right concerning him. The pang this cost her was terrible. Good and kind-hearted as she was, there was no strength of fibre in Martha's character which might enable her to brave everything rather than remain in doubt. She loved her father fondly, but she feared him more, and the stronger her suspicions grew (and unhappily the more she meditated the more they strengthened), the less power she felt either to refute or confirm them.

The note of Miss Brotherton was delivered to her at the family breakfast-table, and the instant she read it the truth suggested itself to her mind. Had she been a free agent, the wounded, shrinking spirit of the poor girl would have certainly led her to invent some excuse for refusing an invitation so full of terror; but she was not.

"What's that about, Martha?" said Sir Matthew, holding out his hand for the note.

"It is from Miss Brotherton," muttered Martha, as she resigned it to him.

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed her eldest sister, "what a wonderful fancy Miss Brotherton seems to have taken for Martha! I do think it is the very oddest thing I ever heard of!"

"What a goose you are, my dear, not to understand it!" observed Miss Harriet, the second sister, giving at the same time a very significant glance towards her brother Augustus.

"But good gracious!" retorted Miss Arabella, why might not any other of us do as well? It would seem so much more natural in such an elegant and fashionable girl as she is."

"She is afraid of us, Bella," replied Miss Harriet, tittering.

Sir Matthew, who had not only read the note, but contrived to hear all that his two eldest daughters said concerning it, here burst into a laugh.

"Set a thief to catch a thief—hey! Harriet? Come, Martha, start away! You have finished your breakfast long ago. I won't have the carriage kept waiting."

"Must I go, papa?" said poor Martha, turning very pale.

"Must you go? and with that die-away look too? Why, Martha! are you jealous, because some folks fancy that the young lady wants to make friends with you, for more reasons than one?"

"I would a great deal rather not go, papa!" replied Martha, in a beseeching accent.

"Martha! I shall be in a downright passion

with you in half a minute. Upon my honour, I never heard anything so cross-grained and unsisterly in my life. Go this moment, and get on your bonnet, and remember if you please, from first to last, to speak of your brother as a sister ought to speak. And if she hints any thing about his having flirted a little with Carry Thompson, be sure to say that he only did it to laugh at her."

As he spoke these words, Sir Matthew rose from the table, as if to accelerate the movement which was to send her off.

Martha listened to him with the habitual reverence which she ever bestowed on all he uttered; but shook her head, as it seemed, involuntarily, as he concluded.

"Why, you don't mean to say he was in earnest, you good-for-nothing, spiteful girl!" cried Lady Dowling, suddenly rousing herself from the dignified apathy in which she usually indulged.

"What a shame!" cried one sister.

"That's too bad!" cried the other.

"Just like her, though!" sneered Mr. Augustus.

"Hold your tongues, all of you," said Sir Matthew: "I know Martha better than any of ye, trust me for that; and what I bid her do

that she will do, and nothing else. Run away, Martha. Don't mind any of 'em."

Thus urged, thus goaded to the interview she dreaded, Martha hastened to leave the room; but ere she passed the door, something at her heart told her that her best course would be to take her father apart, and tell him all. She turned back to look at him, but met a frown so strongly indicative of growing impatience at her delay, that, yielding to the sort of slavish feeling in which she had been nurtured, she hurried forward to obey him. Had she possessed greater moral courage, many subsequent events would have been different.

After the first salutation was over, Miss Brotherton, making a strong mental effort to subdue her agitation—of which she was infinitely more capable than her companion—begged her to sit down; and then, placing herself where she could have, as a commentary on what she might induce her to say, the advantage of watching her countenance, she pronounced in a voice that she in vain laboured to render steady, "My dear Miss Martha, I have suffered a great deal of uneasiness since I last saw you respecting the little boy for whom—concerning whom—I mean Michael

Armstrong, Martha! His mother is very wretched because she cannot discover to what place he has been sent; and I, nothing doubting that it would be perfectly easy to learn this from you, rashly promised that I would obtain this information. Can you, dear girl, tell me more upon this subject now than you could when we last met?"

"I cannot, Miss Brotherton!" replied Martha Dowling, in a voice so low and husky, as hardly to be audible, but with a complexion and features that spoke so plainly what was passing in her heart, that Mary felt ashamed of having placed herself where she could so distinctly read all she suffered, and leaving her chair to share the sofa on which the poor girl was seated, she took her hand and said,

"My poor dear Martha! It would be better for us both that I should speak sincerely. I have become acquainted with an individual, Martha, who knows more, much more, than either you or I can do, my dear girl, respecting the factories—those great magazines of human life and labour by which your father, and mine also, have grown from poverty to wealth. This person, Martha, on my questioning him respecting the probable destination of a child so circumstanced, did not scruple to reply, that if

his master were displeased, and wished to be rid of him, there were places—factories, mills, dear Martha, where the business was so managed as to render labour very heavy punishment, and where it was easy to keep children, ay, hundreds of them, unseen and unknown for years. Do not tremble thus, dear Martha ! Do not draw your hand away from me ! Most sure I am that your heart and my heart must beat in sympathy on such a subject as this. Let us be mutually sincere, and we may help each other to undo whatever wrong may have been done. We know, we both well know, that your father *was* displeased with this poor widow's son. We know, too, that he is a person of great power and influence. The boy is gone—he will not tell us where. What is the inference ? Turn not from it, Martha Dowling, turn not from it, my poor friend, but boldly and honestly seek out the truth, and let me know enough of it to save this helpless child from further suffering."

"I have no means, Miss Brotherton," faltered poor Martha. "If all your dreadful thoughts were true, which you have no right to think they are—and still less have I—but if they were true, all true, I have no means to know it."

"If we have ANY reason to believe them true," said Mary, solemnly, "means MUST be taken, Martha Dowling, to stop further wrong; and this can only be by learning where Michael Armstrong has been sent. I apply to you for this with great reluctance, because I know the subject cannot be brought before you without causing you pain. But I feel it my duty not to shrink from this, and it is yours, my dear girl, to obtain the information I require."

"But if I agreed with you in this, Miss Brotherton, what are my means of obtaining it beyond your own?" said Martha, rousing herself, and feeling renewed courage from remembering that there was no proof whatever of the boy's being otherwise than well and happy.

"Nay, Martha," returned the heiress gravely, "amongst those engaged in your father's service, you can hardly be at a loss to find some one who must have been employed in removing him."

"And would you have me," replied the poor girl, indignantly, "would you have me tamper with my father's servants, in order to obtain a knowledge of what it may be his will to keep secret? Miss Brotherton, I would rather die than do so."

"I honour filial feelings, Martha, and grieve to think that you are placed in circumstances which must compel you to make them secondary," said Mary gently.

"Nothing can make them secondary," retorted Martha, warmly: "I love my father, and I hold my duty to him the first and the highest I have to perform on earth."

"Save only what you owe to your own soul, Martha Dowling," replied Mary. "Had you been yourself for nothing in this matter, I might think as you do, that your duty as a child must prevent your interfering in it, though even that, I suspect, would be but doubtful morality. But, Martha, the case is otherwise. It was by your influence that this helpless widow was induced to send her child away. She did *not* trust your father, but she trusted you. Do you not know, Martha, that I speak the truth? And if I do, can you for an instant doubt that your first duty is to redeem the pledge you gave to this poor trusting creature, who hazarded all that was dearest to her in life, upon your assurance?"

A passionate burst of tears, that seemed rather to convulse than relieve the bosom on which they fell, was the only answer Mary received to her cogent reasonings; and so evi-

dent was the suffering of the innocent culprit who appeared writhing under the discipline she inflicted, that nothing less deeply impressed on her heart than was the remembrance of Edward and his mother, and the grief that threatened to destroy them both, could have given her courage to persevere.

"Martha! dear Martha! Be reasonable!" cried Mary, throwing her arms round her. "If you knew what I suffered in making you suffer, you would pity me! But I have no choice left me. I am not a free agent, Martha, any more than you are: we are both bound in honour, honesty, Christian faith, and Christian mercy, not to let any feeling stop us till we have restored Michael Armstrong to his mother."

"Restore him!" sobbed Martha. "Alas! Miss Brotherton, the poor woman herself has prevented the possibility of that! Do you not know that he is apprenticed?"

"Let us but know *where* he is, Martha, and if the situation be one that his mother can reasonably disapprove, there can be little doubt but means may be taken to release him. Teach us but where to find him, dearest Martha," cried Mary fervently, "and we will all pray for blessings on your head!"

"I cannot do it," replied Martha, with a sigh that very nearly approached a groan.

"How know you that you cannot, Martha? Will you not try to learn this cruel, this nefarious secret?"

"No, I will not, Miss Brotherton," replied the unhappy girl with sudden firmness. "If any wrong has been done to this boy, I know that it must rest upon my head. So let it. The remembrance of it may bring me to the grave, and there I shall find mercy and forgiveness. But it shall not place me in rebellion to my father, nor force me to reveal any secrets which it may be his pleasure to keep. Now let me go, Miss Brotherton. I doubt not you have acted according to your sense of duty, and so have I. In this at least we are equal. Pray let me go; I am not well, and greatly wish to be at home."

Mary looked at her with surprise, and almost with terror: she was as pale as death, and shook, as she stood up before her, as if she had been seized with an ague-fit.

"Alas, Martha!" she exclaimed, "I have made you very miserable, and very ill, yet have gained nothing by it! You shall go, my poor girl, you shall go instantly; but ere we part, let me implore you to examine in

silence, and alone, the question of right and wrong in this case. Paint to yourself the misery of the wretched mother, and remember that yourself—I must say it, though I wring both our hearts as I do it—yourself, Martha Dowling, are the cause of it.”

“You have said enough, Miss Brotherton, to destroy my peace for ever,” replied the miserable girl, “but not enough to make me act as a spy upon my father. Farewell! Do not let us meet again! It is too painful.”

Without waiting for an answer, Martha Dowling wrapped her shawl about her and hurried to the door.

“The carriage is not waiting, Miss Dowling,” said the vexed and disappointed Mary, who had gained nothing from this painful interview, but the conviction that the well-intentioned, but erring Martha was as much persuaded of the boy’s having been unfairly dealt with as herself. “Let me order the carriage for you.”

“No, no, I cannot wait. I can walk. I know the way. Indeed I can stay no longer!” replied Martha, hurrying on, and closing the door of the room after her, and before Miss Brotherton could re-open it, she had already passed through the hall, and was almost running from the house.

Mary lost not a moment in summoning a servant, and ordering the carriage to follow her with all speed, an order which was so well obeyed, that the unhappy Martha was overtaken ere she had walked a mile, and gladly did she then avail herself of it; for by that time every other painful feeling was merged in the terror of having to explain to her father the cause of her having so parted with Miss Brotherton, as to return unattended and on foot. "Perfect love casteth out fear," and perfect fear may perhaps petrify the heart into a sort of unstruggling desperation; but a union of the two reduces the mind to a state of slavery the most abject, leaving no strength whereby any healthful moral feeling can be sustained. Martha's whole care, on returning home, was to satisfy her father that *nothing* particular had passed in her interview with the heiress; and, unfortunately for all parties, she succeeded.

Miss Brotherton, meanwhile, mounted a little pony phaëton with Mrs. Tremlett, and with a heavy heart proceeded to Hoxley-lane. But, painful as was her errand, her condition was a far happier one than that of Martha Dowling; for in her there was no mixture of motives to paralyze every word and act. Her

kind heart sought and found counsel in her sound and upright judgment, and, sustained by it, she executed her task without shrinking. A little reflection on the subject convinced her that it was now become her duty to confess to her poor client, not only that her exertions to discover the abode of Michael had been unsuccessful, but she began to fear that there must be some unpleasant reason for the difficulties thrown in the way of obtaining the information she had sought. It required some courage to utter this; but when it was done, Mary was surprised to perceive that its effect both upon the mother and son was very trifling. Having candidly stated her fears, she remained silent, the eyes of both being fixed upon her with a sort of quiet hopelessness that was perhaps more painful to contemplate than more vehement demonstrations of grief.

"Our thanks are not the less due to you, ma'am," said the widow gently, "and don't vex your kind heart by thinking that we are disappointed. Edward and I guessed true from almost the first; that is, from when he was taken off without bidding us good-bye. Sir Matthew is known better by his mill-people, ma'am, than by the great gentry that turns their eyes away from labour and sorrow, to

revel and grow fat upon our graves. You would never be like to hear the truth from them, and I am told that even now the country round rings with praises of Sir Matthew's goodness to Michael. 'Tis bitter to hear it. But it is God's will our portion should be bitter here. He has power to make it up to us hereafter, and it is there we must fix our hope."

"Most sure and most blessed is that hope!" replied Mary fervently: "yet it should never check our efforts to put to profit the means of happiness he has granted to us here. I have now told you the very worst, Mrs. Armstrong, for I have told you not only all I know, but all I fear—nor will I again pledge myself to do more than I am quite sure it is in my power to perform. I think you will believe, without my talking about it, that I shall not give up the search I have undertaken. But, till some new light reaches us, we should but waste our time and wear our spirits by speaking on the subject. Let us rather think and speak of the welfare of the dear boy that is left you: this will be no hindrance to our restoring his brother, if it be God's will that we should have the power. Tell me, Edward, how did you get on at school to-day?"

"Everybody was kind to me," answered the boy.

"That's well, dear boy, and everybody will be kind to you. He looks nicely in his new clothes, does he not, Mrs. Armstrong?"

"He does indeed, ma'am! and I could almost fancy that he looked better in health already, for having left the mill," replied the widow.

"And I feel better," said Edward, looking at his mother with his soft thoughtful eyes, "and I don't think that it would be impossible for me to grow well again."

"My boy! my boy!" cried the poor cripple, raising herself in her bed, and throwing her arms around him. "Should I dare to complain of anything if that were possible! But oh, Teddy! wouldn't he have given one of his little hands to see it?"

This appeal, which in truth only echoed the thoughts of his own heart, overthrew all the courage of Edward, and his tears again flowed as fast as those of his poor mother; a renewal of weakness of which they might both have been still more ashamed than they were, had they not perceived that neither Miss Brotherton nor her old friend had dry eyes.

Mary, however, was too wise to let this last.

"This dear boy," said she, "has said that which ought to give us all courage. I can hardly tell you the delightful feeling which the hope of his restoration to health would give me. It would repay me a thousand-fold for all the pain I have suffered. Let us fix our thoughts on this hope, and trust me it shall be realized, if medical skill and kind treatment can do it."

It was with this assurance she left them, and, if any earthly promise could have healed the anguish of the mother's heart, it would have been this. But her two children were so twined and twisted together in her thoughts, that meditating upon her hopes for Edward inevitably brought her terrors for Michael before her, and it was but with a fitful sort of satisfaction that the boy dwelt upon his anticipations of being useful to her, or that she listened to him.

Two days after this, while Miss Brotherton and Mrs. Tremlett were pursuing their usual morning occupations in the boudoir, a servant announced that a lady and gentleman were in the drawing-room.

Had the announcement been of a gentleman alone, Mary's thoughts would have instantly suggested Mr. Bell, for they had been fixed

upon him, and the hope of his coming, through both the preceding days. But the mention of the lady puzzled her. Nevertheless the gentleman was Mr. Bell, and no other, and the frank and simple kindness with which he said, as he led the lady forward to meet her, "Miss Brotherton! I wanted my wife to know you too," rendered the introduction as agreeable as it was unexpected.

"If you and I, my dear young lady," said he, "take to consulting together concerning what we may hope, and what we may do in aid of the suffering people by whom we are surrounded, we shall do well to take this good little woman into the committee, for she has probably more practical knowledge of the subject we were discussing when last we met, than any other lady you could meet with."

Equally cordial and sincere was the welcome Mary gave to her new friends; and, if sympathy of feeling, and a community of interest, on a subject of deep importance to them all, could have sufficed to make them happy, the long morning they passed together would have been one of great enjoyment: but they were all too much in earnest to be called happy while dwelling upon the frightful subject to which their thoughts were turned. The longer Mary

listened to those whose lives were passed in struggling to assuage the misery around them, and in battling with the horrid principles which produced it, the more deeply did she feel that she, too, was called upon to labour in the same thorny vineyard. Yet, terrible as were the subjects they discussed, and sad as was the conviction that no power less mighty than that of the law could redress the evils they deplored, there was still something inexpressibly soothing to her feelings, in finding herself thus in intimate relation with persons who comprehended and shared in the sentiments which had become so essentially a part of herself. Though her conscience had told her, from the first moment her attention had been called to the subject, that it was her duty not to turn away from it, she had hitherto met little but opposition from those around her, and though steadfast and firm in purpose, she had often felt heavy in spirit from knowing herself to be alone, when she so much wanted assistance and support. This oppressive loneliness she could never suffer from again, as long as Mr. Bell and his excellent wife were within her reach, and fervently did she bless the courage which had led her to their dwelling. Tidings of poor Michael, however, there

were none. Mr. Bell had sought information concerning him wherever he thought it possible to obtain it, but he had learnt nothing. Nevertheless he declared himself by no means satisfied that the boy might not be at some one of the Bastille-like establishments to which he had applied. "I know them, and they know me too well," he said, "for me to place implicit confidence in any answer they may be pleased to make to any question I may venture to ask. If I knew where to find a trustworthy stranger, who could not by possibility be recognised by any one as a friend of mine, I still think the chances would be greatly in favour of our finding the boy at some of the noted apprenticing establishments which I have named. But, in truth, I know not where to look for such a person."

"Am I not such a one?" cried Mary eagerly. "Hardly a creature in the world, beyond the town of Ashleigh and its neighbourhood, knows me personally, and, in all such places as those you have named, the Emperor of all the Russias would not be less likely to be recognised."

"But how, my dear young lady, could you represent yourself with any face of probability as interested in the inquiries you would have to make?" demanded Mr. Bell.

"Methinks, Mr. Bell," replied Mary, colour-

ing with her own enthusiasm,—“methinks I could carry through an enterprise which had the recovery of little Michael for its object, with a degree of diplomatic skill that would surprise you. It should not be by downright and direct inquiry that I should proceed. Where such inquiry would be likely to excite suspicion, I would only contrive to insinuate myself and my eyes, and would ask no questions save what they should answer.”

“Many strangers, travelling, desire to see the factories, certainly,” replied Mr. Bell, musingly. “But you are so young to undertake a wandering expedition. And then, how could you be accompanied? Your servants would unquestionably announce you everywhere.”

“I am older, I think, than you suppose,” replied Mary; “and, if I undertake this, I will be accompanied by Mrs. Tremlett, with whom I have no reserves, and by no one else.”

“You cannot travel without attendants, Miss Brotherton?” said the clergyman, looking at her kindly, but as if doubting that she was quite in earnest.

“Do not either of you judge me harshly,” replied the heiress, with great earnestness; “do not set me down in your judgments as a hot-headed girl, indifferent to the opinions of society, and anxious only to follow the whim

of the moment. Did I belong to any one, I think I should willingly yield to their guidance. But I am alone in the world : I have no responsibilities but to God and my own conscience ; and the only way I know of, by which I can make this desolate sort of freedom endurable, is by fearlessly, and without respect to any prejudices or opinions whatever, employing my preposterous wealth in assisting the miserable race from whose labours it has been extracted. If you can aid me in doing this, you will do me good ; but you will do me none, Mr. Bell, by pointing out to me the etiquettes by which the movements of other young ladies are regulated. I cannot think that I have any right to a place among them ; and I therefore feel that to check any possible usefulness by a constant reference to the usages of persons with whom I have little or nothing in common, would be putting on very heavy harness, neither effective for use, nor for ornament. But ‘ something too much of this.’ I must not talk of myself,” she added cheerfully. “ Let us examine the possibility of my setting off with Mrs. Tremlett on a little home tour, without announcing the important event to the neighbourhood, or taking any servants with me to enact the part of Fame behind my chariot.”

“ By what conveyance would you propose to travel, Miss Brotherton ? ” inquired Mr. Bell, still looking, as an American would say, “ as if he could realize the scheme.”

Mary meditated for a moment, and then replied—“ In the first instance, if you and Mrs. Bell will permit it, we shall go to your house in the same manner as before, only carrying with us a small travelling-trunk or so, such as would be necessary if we were going to pass a week with you. On the following morning we would set off by the *** coach, in which you will secure places for us. At *** we will order dinner and beds, like any other travellers, and inquire of the waiter what will be the best way of getting a sight of the factories.”

“ And he will tell you that such and such factories—naming precisely those in which there would not be the slightest chance of finding the boy—may be seen by application made to Mr. So-and-so,” said Mr. Bell.

- Mary coloured, and seemed about to answer him ; but, either from consciousness that she had nothing very satisfactory to reply, or because she had some notion in her head not sufficiently digested to communicate, she changed her purpose, and, instead of combating an objection which seemed almost fatal, drew from

her pocket a set of little ivory tablets, on which she had written the names of all the establishments within a distance of twenty miles, notorious for taking apprentices, and of retaining them by means that converted the scene of their labour into a most strict and wretched prison-house. She read their names aloud. "These, I think, were all you mentioned to me?" said she.

"I think they were," replied Mr. Bell. "But to these, believe me, you will get no admission as a visiter."

"Will *you* admit me as a visiter, if I come to you the day after to-morrow, Mrs. Bell?" said the heiress, playfully, and apparently wishing to waive any further discussion of her projects.

"Most joyfully !" was the kind and hospitable reply.

"Then, for the rest we must trust to chance. And now, if you will let me, I will show you my pretty garden," said Miss Brotherton, rising, and taking from a chair by the open window the ever-ready shawl and parasol, which made her lawns and shrubberies essentially a part of her dwelling-place. "Of all the fine things I possess, I believe I am only truly thankful for this," she continued : "I hardly

know how I should pass my life if I had not a garden."

The garden was indeed one that spoke of its owner's love, by a multitude of enjoyable nooks that seemed all courting her approach, and by that perfection of elegant neatness which is never found in an equal degree where the mistress is indifferent respecting it. To her new friend's praises of all this she listened with pleasure, and sketched many pleasant plans for future meetings, when they should not, as they declared unavoidable now, remain only while their horse was resting. But Mary said not a word more on the subject of her purposed expedition till the very moment of their departure, and then it was only to remind them that they would see her come with her friend to claim their promised hospitality on the next day but one. This was received with renewed promises of a joyful welcome, and so they parted.

The next day was a busy one for Mary. In the first place she was closeted for at least two hours after breakfast with Mrs. Tremlett, and whatever might be the subject of their conversation it appeared to end satisfactorily, for when it was over Mary embraced her old friend very cordially, saying, "I feel more grateful, much more grateful, than I have words to ex-

press, nurse Tremlett, and never shall I forget your kindness to me!"

After this they drove to the entrance of Hoxley-lane, and walked thence to pay a farewell visit to Mrs. Armstrong; and here it was evident that, however wild the projects might be which the heiress had conceived, she knew how to be discreetly silent concerning them, for, after bestowing upon the widow a gratuity sufficient to supply all her wants for a longer time than she purposed to be absent, she took leave of her, saying, "You will not see me again, Mrs. Armstrong, for a week or more. I am engaged to go from home for that time; but I shall take care that Edward shall receive as much attention at the school as if I were at home. Be sure, also, that my absence will not make me the less mindful of Michael. Neither at home nor abroad shall I cease to employ every means in my power to obtain intelligence concerning him."

To Edward, whom she visited at the school, she gave the same assurance, adding an earnest injunction that he should keep in mind the necessity of exerting himself, both for the industrious prosecution of his studies, and the not less important regulation of his mind on the subject of his brother's absence, the welfare of his mother greatly depending upon both.

Weakness of every kind seemed to vanish before the powerful stimulant thus offered, and she left her little protégé comforted and invigorated by the belief that he had a great duty to perform, and that his mother was the object of it.

The preparations for her own and her friend's convenience during the journey were very simple, but they puzzled her maid considerably. First, it was so very odd that she should be going out upon a visit and take absolutely no dinner dresses at all with her; and, secondly, it was, if possible, odder still, that she should not take her. But Mary listened to all the hints and inuendoes to which these feelings gave rise with a sort of gentle indifference, which was doubtless very provoking, till at length she was induced to damp the curiosity, which she feared might prove inconveniently active during her absence, by saying, "I am going to visit the family of a clergyman, Morgan, and, as much dress will not be necessary, I shall not want you."

This was perfectly satisfactory. "A clergyman's family, where much dress would not be necessary, was where the lady's maid never did nor never could want to go."

Nothing could have been more judicious than these explanatory words. They accorded perfectly with the report of the servants who

attended the carriage, and so completely satisfied the household, that, though it was the first absence of so long duration that she had made from her home since she became mistress of it, it fortunately led to no gossipings whatever.

We must not pause to describe the pleasant sociable evening passed by our travellers at the house of Mr. Bell, nor even relate all that was said, in the course of it, concerning the expedition they were about to undertake. Every instruction, every hint which Mr. Bell believed might be useful, he gave clearly and succinctly, and not a word of it was lost upon Mary.

CHAPTER XI.

Miss Brotherton sets off on her travels, and feels frightened at her own temerity—But speedily recovers her courage, and plays the heroine—She visits some factories, and is introduced to a Sunday-school—She approaches the precincts of the Deep Valley.

It was about nine o'clock on a bright autumn morning that Miss Brotherton and her faithful nurse mounted into a lumbering six-inside vehicle, bound for ***. Their two small trunks, with "*Mrs. Tremlett, passenger,*" modestly written on both, were safely lodged on the top; Mr. Bell gave them a silent blessing and a silent nod; the horse-boy vociferated "All right," and the richest young lady in Lancashire rolled off, very literally, in search of adventures.

The novelty of her situation, and of her sensations of every kind, the unceremonious examination bestowed upon her by a smart young clerk who sat opposite, the anxious look of Mrs. Tremlett's usually tranquil face, and the

consciousness that the enterprise she was upon must even by herself be characterized as wildly extravagant, if not carried through with much steady courage and discretion, altogether produced a feeling of oppression on her heart that very nearly overcame her. "Am I acting rightly in thus exposing myself?" was the question that her startled nerves suggested; and had her conscience been unable to answer it boldly and promptly, her condition would have been really pitiable. Happily, however, this was not the case. There was some feminine timidity about Mary Brotherton, but not an atom of false shame or affectation of any kind. "Yes!—I am right!" was the answer recorded on her heart of hearts, "and shame to me if I shrink at the first step, for no better reason than because the dust flies, and a vulgar young man stares me in the face."

From that moment, Mary recoiled no more; and a little resolute meditation on her object, and of the strength demanded to obtain it, so effectually restored her usual self-possession, that she looked round upon her fellow-travellers with as little embarrassment as if she had been used to travel in public all her life, nodded to Mrs. Tremlett with an encouraging smile, and thought how very silly people were

who fancied that every thing unusual must of necessity be terrible.

"Are you going all the way to * * *, miss?" said a goodnatured-looking woman who sat *bodkin* between the smart clerk and Mrs. Tremlett.

"Yes, ma'am, I am," replied Mary, civilly.

The goodnatured woman twisted herself round to reconnoitre Mrs. Tremlett.

"Your mamma, I suppose, my dear?"

"No, ma'am—the lady is a friend!"

"Oh! I ask your pardon; you are so very much alike made me say it."

Mary bowed—Mrs. Tremlett smiled.

The goodnatured-looking woman persevered in the same train of pertinent observation, sometimes addressed to one passenger, and sometimes to another, so as to prevent the party from sinking into total silence, which might otherwise, perhaps, have happened. But Mary bore her share in this trifling annoyance with perfect good humour; and when at length they arrived at * * *, and Mrs Tremlett asked her in rather piteous accents, the moment they were alone together, whether she did not feel dreadfully worn out, she cheerfully replied,

"Not the least in the world, my dear friend."

"Thank God!" replied the old woman, fer-

vently, "I know you do so hate to be bothered, Mary, that I was afraid that old fool would put you out of all patience."

"Times are altered with me now, nurse Tremlett," replied Mary; "I have left off living for myself, and I feel my temper improving already by it. Now, then, ring the bell, and give your orders; remember, nurse, you are the great lady, and must order everything."

Encouraged by this cheerful submission to circumstances, which was in truth somewhat more than she expected, Mrs. Tremlett began to think that Mary might indeed prove capable of carrying through the scheme, the first sketch of which had appeared so wild, that nothing short of a devotion to her will, which knew no bounds, could have surmounted her averseness to it.

"My darling child!" cried the old woman, looking at her with equal admiration and delight, "your mind is as strong as your heart is tender, and never will I again oppose my silly ignorance to anything you wish to do."

It was not difficult in this first stage of their expedition to follow exactly the plan that had been laid down. The two ladies professed themselves to be travellers anxious to see all objects of curiosity, and particularly the fac-

tories, which were, as they observed, so famous throughout all the world. The master of the hotel where they lodged exerted himself with the utmost civility to gratify so natural a desire, and Mrs. Tremlett and Mary were accordingly promenaded, on the following morning, through one of the largest establishments of the town. It is probable, from the drowsiness of the public mind on the subject, that many travelling strangers, who are in like manner led by a skilful official through the various floors of a factory, retire from the spectacle they present without having any feeling of sympathy excited by the cursory glance they have thrown over the silent unobtrusive little beings, one moment of whose unchanging existence they have been permitted to witness. It is the vast, the beautiful, the elaborate machinery by which they were surrounded, that called forth all their attention, and all their wonder. The uniform ceaseless movement, sublime in its sturdy strength and unrelenting activity, drew every eye, and rapt the observer's mind in boundless admiration of the marvellous power of science ! No wonder that along every line a score of noiseless children toiled, unthought of after the admirable machine. Strangers do not visit factories to look at *them* : it is the triumphant

perfection of British mechanism which they come to see, it is of that they speak, of that they think, of that they boast when they leave the life-consuming process behind them. The more delicate, and (alas!) living springs by which the GREAT ARTIFICER has given movement to the beings made in his own image are not worth a thought the while. The scientific speculator sees nothing to excite his intellectual acumen in them; he hardly knows that they are there, but gazes with enthusiasm and almost reverence on the myriads of whirling spindles amidst which they breathe their groans, unheeded and unheard.

But it was not thus that Mary won her way through the whirling, hissing world of machinery into which she now entered for the first time in her life. The hot and tainted atmosphere seemed to weigh upon her spirits, as well as upon her lungs, and the weary aspect of the Drakes, and the failing joints of Edward Armstrong, became fearfully intelligible as she watched the children (and she watched nothing else) who dragged their attenuated limbs along. Then it was that Mr. Bell's tremendous statement of the number of suffering beings thus employed came with full force upon her mind. She would have given years of ex-

istence at that moment could she have believed it false. Two hundred thousand little creatures, created, by the abounding mercy of God, with faculties for enjoyment so perfect, that no poverty short of actual starvation can check their joy, so long as innocence and liberty be left them! Two hundred thousand little creatures, for whose freedom from toil during their tender years the awful voice of nature has gone forth, to be snatched away, living and feeling, from the pure air of heaven, while the beautiful process is going on by which their delicate fabric gradually strengthens into maturity,—taken for ever from all with which their Maker has surrounded them for the purpose of completing his own noblest work—taken and lodged amidst stench, and stunning, terrifying tumult,—driven to and fro, till their little limbs bend under them—hour after hour, day after day—the repose of a moment to be purchased only by yielding their tender bodies to the fist, the heel, or the strap of the overlooker! All this rushed together upon poor Mary's heart and soul, and, turning deadly pale, she seized the arm of her friend to save herself from falling.

“Terrible hot day!” roared their conductor in the hideous scream by which some human

voices can battle successfully with the din of machinery.

Fortunately, they were near the door of the room, and Mrs. Tremlett, urging her steps forward, now brought her to an open window outside it. The fresh air, so carefully excluded within,* soon revived her: the colour returned to her lips, and having remained silently inhaling the breeze for another minute or two, she signified her wish to proceed.

"Not now, Mary! Pray, not now!" said the frightened Mrs. Tremlett. "Indeed, indeed, you have not strength for it!"

Mary gave her one steady look, and the opposition ceased; for it said as plainly as look could speak—"Is it thus that I shall find Michael Armstrong?"

"For a moment, I felt the heat oppressive," said Miss Brotherton, in a voice of very steady composure. "But I am quite sure the sensation will not return. I came to * * * on purpose to see the factories, my dear friend, and, indeed, you must not disappoint me."

"The young lady's right," replied their conductor. "She'll never see the like of our mills,

* Except in the mills of Messrs. Wood and Walker, at Bradford, it is difficult to find any factory properly ventilated—free admission of air being injurious to many of the processes carried on in them.

you may depend upon that. Why, all the machinery in the known world put altogether won't equal one of our spinning-mills. There is nothing in creation to compare to it; and I don't question but the young lady heard as much before she come. So it would be altogether wrong to disappoint her of the sight of 'em."

"Thank you," said Mary. "Are we to go upstairs now?"

"Yes, if you please, miss. We have got seven stories here, and, thank God, all is busy just now, one as the other, from the bottom to the top."

On entering the second room, Mary felt, as she expected, that her bodily strength was quite sufficient to sustain her. She had not habituated herself to "meet the sun upon the upland lawn" for nothing. Few girls so lapped in luxury could boast of equal vigour and activity. The first aspect of the system (the horrors of which had been so clearly explained to her) in action, was for a moment overwhelming—but it was past—the terrible "*premier pas*" could not come again, and, far from shrinking from the task she had imposed upon herself, she left the enormous fabric, after having perseveringly mounted to its summit, with the satisfactory

conviction, that she should not fail in her enterprise either from want of strength, or from want of will.

Good Mrs. Tremlett, however, still felt less confident upon the subject, and no sooner found herself *tête-à-tête* with her young mistress within the shelter of their drawing-room, than she said, " You will never stand it, Miss Mary !—feeling about it all as you do—the sight of those poor ragged, sickly little souls will be the death of you."

" Then so let me die, dear nurse !" replied Mary. " If I have not vigour enough, both of mind and body, to be in some degree useful, I should hardly think it worth while to live ; but I know myself better, nurse Tremlett. I turned sick and giddy, I confess, on entering that first room, but it is my friend, Mr. Bell, who has to answer for it. The impressions received at that moment by my senses served as a specimen of all the horrors he had described to me. The account I had heard enabled me at a glance to comprehend the scene before me, while that scene itself acted back again, as it were, upon my memory, making me understand, a thousand times more clearly than before, all the frightful details he had given me. The effect of this was overpowering, but it cannot return

upon me again in the same manner ; I am already hardened. Think, therefore, no more of me, dear friend, but let us cogitate together upon the likeliest way of turning all such visits to account."

This cogitation led them both to the conclusion that it might, for the sake of appearances, be as well to take the landlord's recommendation to another of the establishments, usually pointed out to the attention of strangers, and then to consult the ivory tablets, and venture upon a visit to the only one near * * *, named therein, as notorious for the reception of apprentices.

In pursuance of this plan, the waiter was again interrogated when he attended the ladies at their luncheon, and again he brought a written address from his master, accompanied by a message intimating that the following morning being Sunday, the ladies might have the advantage of visiting the Sunday-school attached to the factory, for which he had given the address, to a sight of which they would be admitted without difficulty, if they would make known their wishes for such admission to the person who would show them the factory.

" There is a Sunday-school attached to the establishment ?" said Mary in an accent of

great satisfaction. "Yes, miss," replied the man, "Messrs. Robert and Joseph Tomlins, the serious gentlemen as owns the factory, has built a school-room altogether at their own expense, and attends their ownelves in person every Sunday morning to see that both master and children puts the time to profit. Their factory is about a mile or so out of the town, but master says as he can let you have a carriage very reasonable."

"I should wish to go there by all means," replied Mary: "desire the carriage may be got ready for us directly."

The man left the room to obey her.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Mary, as the door closed behind him, "there is, then, some Christian feeling still left among them here, as well as at Bradford. We shall not here, at least, be shocked by witnessing such degrading ignorance as that of the poor Drakes. They are treated like Christian children, at any rate."

"Most surely, it is a pleasure to hear of it, my dear," replied Mrs. Tremlett; "and it is quite as well, Mary, that we have got to ride to it—at least if you feel like me, my dear."

Less than half an hour's drive brought the travellers to a large factory, which, whatever it might be within, was on the outside, though

in itself as grim as coal-smoke could make it, surrounded by a fine expanse of rural scenery. In answer to their application at the gates they were civilly desired to walk in, and presently found that the routine of exhibition was precisely similar to that of the morning. It struck them both, however, that, if possible, the children looked more worn and weary, more miserably lean, and more frightfully pallid, than those they had seen before; nevertheless Mary failed not, when taking leave of their conductor, to request permission to attend the Sunday-school on the morrow.

"Certainly!" was the reply, pronounced in a tone as clearly announcing the speaker's connexion with the party self-styled Evangelical, as the broadest Irish brogue does the birth-right of the speaker to call himself a son of the Emerald Isle. "Certainly! the Lord forbid that Christian women should ask to be present at the doings of the godly, and be refused!"

On inquiring the hour at which they should be there, the man replied, "As the clock in the tower of the Lord's house strikes seven, Mr. Joseph Tomlins, by the blessing of God, will begin to speak the exhortation. The prayer will follow from the lips of Mr. Robert, and then the schooling will begin."

"We must be here, then, exactly at seven?" said Mary.

"Ten minutes earlier would be more decent time," replied the man, with a gravity of aspect that approached a frown: "our gentlemen are very strict as to their hours in all things."

They civilly promised to be very punctual, and departed. The factory was built on the side of a hill, so steep, that the back part of it, to which the shed used as a school-room was attached, could not be safely approached by a carriage: Miss Brotherton, therefore, and her old friend, on arriving at the bottom of the hill on the following morning, got out, and, desiring the vehicle to await their return, proceeded on foot by the path pointed out to them as "The way to Muster Tomlins' school." The ladies were more than punctual, for it still wanted a quarter to seven: they therefore seated themselves on a fallen tree by the roadside, and watched the arrival of one or two miserable-looking children who were laggingly approaching the spot.

"You look half asleep, my poor child!" said Mary, laying her hand on the shoulder of a little girl, who, ragged, pale, half-washed, and with eyes half-closed, was being dragged onward by an older child, a boy, apparently about ten years old.

"She be so hard asleep by times," said the boy, "that I can't get her on."

"But why is that, my dear? Surely seven o'clock is not so very early?" said Mary.

"We were all to the mill till five minutes afore twelve," said the boy, making another effort to pull his sister onward.

"How!—do you mean to tell me that you were working at midnight?" demanded Mary.

"Five minutes afore twelve we stopped—'cause it was Sunday," replied the boy. "Come along, Peggy!" he added with another stout tug, "I shall catch it to-morrow from the looker if I'se too late for the 'sortation."

The little girl who had fallen fairly asleep, during this short delay, being thus roused again, stumbled onwards, leaving Mrs. Tremlett and Mary alike undeceived as to the humanity of instituting a school to be carried on under such regulations. They determined, however, to witness with their own eyes the operation of teaching children to read who were fast asleep, and, walking on, came within sight of the school-room door just as Mr. Joseph Tomlins showed himself on the step before it, with his watch in one hand and a Bible in the other.

"Wicked and ungrateful children!" he be-

gan, "Is this the way you obey your earthly master, who leaves his comfortable bed, and his breakfast untouched, to lead you to the feet of your heavenly one? Wicked, idle, and ungrateful——" But at this moment Miss Brotherton and Mrs. Tremlett appeared in sight, and in a voice suddenly changed from reprobation into drawling softness, he went on, "Come unto Him, little children—I forbid you not, but urge you with tender Christian love, early and late, late and early, to hear His word, and sing His praise."

Here he stopped, and, bowing to the ladies, offered to lead them to a place where they might be well accommodated for the exhortation and prayer, and for hearing the children also, if they wished it.

As soon as they had entered the sort of pew to which Mr. Tomlins led them, the twenty or thirty miserable-looking children who were assembled in the room were called upon by a loud word of command to "KNEEL!" and down they tumbled, the elder ones in several instances taking the little creatures already asleep beside them, and placing them on the floor as nearly as they could, in the attitude commanded. The sonorous voice of Mr. Joseph Tomlins was then heard pronouncing an

exhortation, intended to show that obedience to their earthly masters was the only way of saving children from the eternal burning prepared for those who were disobedient in the world to come.

Mary, as she looked earnestly round upon every child present, greatly doubted if there was one sufficiently awake to listen to this; and in her heart, she blessed the heaviness which saved them from hearing the mercy of their Maker blasphemed. A prayer followed this exhortation, as little like what a prayer ought to be, as was the preparation of the little congregation who listened to it for bearing part in a religious ceremony. Still Mary Brotherton waited to the end, nor left her station till the nominal business of instruction had proceeded sufficiently to convince her that poor Sophy Drake's account was strictly true when she said "keeping our eyes open on Sundays wasn't possible, 'cause they didn't strap us." The children were *not* strapped, and consequently they were, with very few exceptions, literally fast asleep during the hour and half that this ostentatious form of instruction was going on.

Unwilling to attract more notice than was necessary, Miss Brotherton and her companion

remained till the drowsy tribe were roused, awakened, and dismissed by the loud voice of Mr. Joseph Tomlins, and then they also slipped away, regained the carriage that waited for them, and returned to * * *.

"Now, then," said Mary, as their one horse dragged them deliberately along, "now, then, dear Tremlett, our search must really begin. As soon as we have breakfasted we will set off in this same equipage for —— Mill, that being the first on my list where apprentices are taken, and, moreover, within a morning's drive of * * *."

"And how shall you endeavour to gain admittance, my dear?" demanded her friend.

"As we did yesterday—merely stating that we are strangers, travelling, who are desirous of seeing the factories," replied Mary.

"But you don't expect to get in, my dear, do you?—after all Mr. Bell told you about apprentices!" exclaimed Mrs. Tremlett.

"Probably not," was the answer, "and in that case, my dear woman, you know what is to happen."

"You are really in earnest then, Miss Mary?" rejoined her friend in an accent which betrayed some nervousness. "You really mean to do all you said when we were shut up together?"

"Most certainly I do," replied Miss Brotherton gravely. "Did you suppose I was jesting, nurse Tremlett, in what I then said to you?"

"Not jesting, Miss Mary. No, certainly, not jesting. Only I thought that maybe, after a little more thinking about it, you might change your mind."

"You do not yet understand me, nurse!" said Mary, with vexation. "You do not yet comprehend how determined I am to persevere in the business I have undertaken."

"Do not say so, dearest Miss Mary!" replied the old woman with emotion, "I do understand you,—I do know that you will leave no stone unturned to obtain your object,—and indeed, indeed, I love you a thousand times better than ever I did, and that is just because I do understand you; only I did not feel quite sure that you would have courage."

"We shall see, nurse Tremlett. Courage, I believe, often depends more upon the earnestness of the will, than the strength of the nerves," said Mary.

Their attempt to get admittance to the apprentice factory was, as they both expected, abortive: they were told that no persons were admitted there except on business, and, having

nothing such to plead, they retreated as they had advanced, somewhat fearful lest their having taken so much trouble for nothing might excite the alarming observation, "It is very odd," on the part of their driver or some of his gossips.

The distance was considerably greater than they had expected, and they had little more time on their return to * * * than sufficed for securing places in a cross-country coach for the morrow, which would convey them to a small town named by Mr. Bell, within a morning's drive of which were two establishments known to receive apprentices, howsoever and wheresoever they could get them.

Having again booked their places in the name of Tremlett, prepared their travelling luggage for a further progress, and taken a meal that served for dinner and tea in one, they went to rest. But it was long ere the excited mind of Mary permitted her to sleep; nor did she, in fact, close her eyes till, after repeated consideration, she had decided totally to change the plan of operations she had fixed upon for the morrow.

Mrs. Tremlett had not yet left her bed, when her young mistress appeared at the foot of it, on the following morning, with her ivory tablets

in her hand. "Nurse Tremlett," she said, "do you remember which, among all the places mentioned here, was the one Mr. Bell declared that he considered as the *most* likely for Sir Matthew to have selected, if his purpose was to keep the abode of Michael Armstrong unknown?"

"Dear me! My dear Miss Mary! Only think of your being up already and me lying abed so!" was the reply she received.

"Never mind that, dear nurse. It is not getting-up time yet—only I am restless. Do you remember the name of the mills Mr. Bell particularly dwelt upon?"

"I dare say I might, Miss Mary, if I was to hear it spoken again," said the old woman, sitting up in bed, and endeavouring to feel awake.

"Now then listen, dear soul, and stop me when you think I name the right." Mary then turned to her tablets, and read the names, with the descriptions of the localities inscribed there. It was not till she had reached the last in the list that Mrs. Tremlett again spoke, and then she exclaimed promptly, "That is it, Mary! I am quite sure that is the place! 'I will bet ten to one,' he said, 'that, if Sir Matthew has been for putting the boy out of sight,

Deep Valley Mill is where he will have lodged him.' Those were his words, Miss Mary—I could quite swear it."

"I was pretty sure of it before, nurse Tremlett, but now no doubt can possibly remain. Hear me, then, my dear kind friend, and tell me truly if I am right or wrong. I settled last night, nurse, to set off and visit all these factories exactly in the order in which they are here set down. But after I went to bed, it struck me that it would be surely better to begin with the place pointed out by our good friend as the most likely to afford success. I like the business quite as little as you do, nurse, and would gladly shorten it, if possible."

"But, my dear, won't the stage we are going in take us the wrong way?"

"A little round about—but I see no objection in that: we have no particular wish, you know, to have our course traced, and this setting off in one direction, when our purpose is to take another, must go far towards preventing it. So that you see we have no immediate change to make, and you have only to get up and eat your breakfast in time to be ready for the coach that is to stop for us here."

"God bless your dear heart!" said the old

woman. "You think ten times more of me than you do of yourself, darling! Little sleep last night, Mary, and getting up before anybody else in the morning, is not the way to be quite strong and composed by-and-by."

"Fear nothing—I feel particularly well, and greatly pleased by our change of plans. I have great faith in this visit to Deep Valley, and long to have the experiment made and over."

Mary Brotherton was quite correct in her geography: the place to which the coach conveyed them was at about the same distance from Deep Valley as from * * *; and, without making any further inquiries concerning that mysterious spot, which indeed the memoranda received from Mr. Bell rendered quite unnecessary, she ordered a chaise, on quitting the stage-coach, to convey them to the nearest town at which he had stated that it would be likely they should find decent accommodation for the night.

Both the young and the old lady were rather surprised on reaching this place to find every house in it that offered public accommodation so poor and miserable looking as to make them almost afraid to enter. Their driver, however, soon drew up to one which,

upon Mrs. Tremlett's inquiring if it were the best, he assured them was not only the best, but the only one that ladies could find comfortable. "Here then we will get out," said Mary, courageously, and giving her friend an encouraging smile, she preceded her into a room that smelt strongly of tobacco-smoke, ale, and gin.

"Can we have an upstairs room that might be more open and airy like?" said Mrs. Tremlett, looking anxiously at her young mistress.

"To sleep in?" demanded the woman who had received them.

"A sitting room, good woman, I mean," responded the meek-spirited Mrs. Tremlett, half frightened by the woman's look and accent.

"What, this is not good enough, I suppose? Then you may trudge—it is good enough for your betters," replied the woman, looking most alarmingly sulky. Had the last been addressed to herself, Mary Brotherton would have thought it one of the duties imposed by her pilgrimage to endure it; but, as it was, she slipped out of the dungeon-parlour with great celerity, and reached the house-door before the postboy had succeeded in his attempts to untie the cord which fastened their trunks behind the chaise. Apparently hands



"No! you devils impus! I'll do ye 'off to
your mates er by" p239

Mary flitted back again through the vapour of tobacco and spirits to rescue her old friend,—a deed of daring that found its reward in the look of gentle satisfaction with which her signal to quit the parlour was obeyed: for Mrs. Tremlett was one who could not bandy words; and she had therefore endured, without intermission or resistance, as much insolence, as could be compressed into the period of her abode in the apartment.

“Why did you not follow me at once, dear nurse?” said Mary, as soon as the postboy had closed the carriage-door upon them.

“Bless you, my dear, I never thought of getting away again till to-morrow morning, and I stayed with her to prevent her following you. How very glad I am we are got away safe and sound from that terrible woman! How could you have the courage and cleverness to think of it, Mary? Sure enough, dear, it is you that take care of me—and that’s a shame, isn’t it?”

“It is but fair, nurse, that we should divide the labours of the road between us. It is you who always take care that we are not starved, and it is not too much in return that I should be watchful for your preservation from all the wild cats and tigresses we may chance to encounter.”

The postboy earned his golden gratuity,



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greatly to the contentment of its donor, by drawing up at a small but perfectly neat little mansion, where milk-pans set on end to dry before the door offered a delightful contrast to all that had been visible at the sign of the Three Crowns. The clean-coifed landlady looked a little surprised at being asked for sleeping-rooms by ladies entitled to so splendid a mode of travelling, but the demand being satisfactorily answered, they were quickly installed in a parlour smelling of geraniums instead of gin, and giving orders for their evening meal to the bustling good woman of the house with an air of old-acquaintanceship that looked as if they had been her guests for a month.

"Nothing was ever so fortunate as this, nurse Tremlett," said Mary, as soon as they were left alone; "our stage-playing, as you are pleased to call it, must begin here. There is no danger that this kind simple-hearted creature should misdoubt a word we say, and if you will only perform your allotted part with your usual quiet good sense, I have no doubt but we shall reach her heart sufficiently to make her very useful. I do not ask you to say anything—only look sufficiently interested to support the character I assign you."

"Oh! dear Miss Mary!" exclaimed Mrs. Tremlett, colouring,—“is it to begin already?”

The countenance of Miss Brotherton fell from an expression of great animation into that of deep despondency and disappointment: she found that all her difficulties with the old woman were about to be renewed. “Oh! why Mrs. Tremlett, if you are unequal to this, did you not honestly tell me so when I explained my purpose to you before we set out?” said she with more severity than she had ever used in addressing her during her whole life before: “I could then have taken measures to carry on this business without you. You know how deeply my heart is in it—I did not expect this weakness—I thought it was over!”

“You are wrong, Miss Mary, you are mistaken altogether,” replied Mrs. Tremlett, eagerly. “I am neither weak nor silly, and so you shall see, if you won’t be so very rash and hasty with me.”

By no means displeased with the energy with which the good woman defended herself, Mary replied, “Let me see this, Tremlett, and my love and value for you will increase a hundred fold.”

“Begin, then, as soon as you like, my dear, I am quite ready.” And, in saying this, the

good old woman assumed an aspect as full of confidence and courage as her own.

In a few minutes their repast, which a good dairy made luxurious, was before them, the landlady remaining in attendance to replenish the tea-pot, and so forth.

Miss Brotherton's manners, though by no means remarkable to those in her own station for that perfect polish which guards everything without, and every thing within, from disagreeable impressions, were always conciliatory and kind to all below her, and, seldom was she waited upon by any one who would not have gladly retained that office near her. So it was with Mrs. Prescott of the King's Head: the good woman lingered in the room, evidently because she liked being there, and, taking advantage of this, Mary addressed her, venturing to give her the name she had read upon the sign.

"We are in Derbyshire, are we not, Mrs. Prescott?"

"Yes, Miss; this is Derbyshire, sure enough."

"What distance is it from hence to Deep Valley?"

"What, the factory, miss, that is called Deep Valley Mill?"

"Yes ; how far is it to that factory?"

"Why, it is not over easy to say rightly, seeing that there is no direct road to it. It is a lonesome out-of-the-way place as ever human beings thought of taking to, and I can't say as much is knowed about it by any of the neighbours round. There is a cart-road, I believe, as goes right down to the mill, but the nearest way would be over them hills there, of course, because the factory is built down amongst the very middlemost of 'em," replied Mrs. Prescott.

"Would the walk over the hills be too far for my aunt and me?" inquired Mary.

"Oh, dear, yes, miss ! I should think so ! Besides, 'tis no place whatever for ladies to go to. The poor little creturs as bides there bean't no sight for them to look at ; and, besides, nobody of any sort is ever let to look at 'em."

"We must get there, somehow or other, Mrs. Prescott," said Mary ; "and I trust in God that we shall not be refused admittance, for our business is no common one."

"You have got business at Deep Valley Mill?" demanded Mrs. Prescott, abruptly.

"Indeed we have," replied Mary, "and, by some means or other, we must get in, and, what is more, we must see every apprentice they have."

The woman shook her head.

"I have had more than one lodging here for a night," said she, "who for some reason or other was curious to get inside of Deep Valley Mill. But I never knowed one of 'em that ever did more than get a look down upon it from the top of one of them mountainous hills out yonder; and it is no easy matter, they say, to get to the right place even for that; for, by what folks say, them as built the mills seem to think that they could puzzle the wicked one himself to find 'em out. But there's one eye as sees 'em, if no other do."

These last words were added in a mutter that might, or might not, be noticed, according to the pleasure of the parties within hearing. Mary did not notice them.

"Could you have the kindness to tell us to whom we should apply for permission to go through the factory?" said she.

"Indeed, miss, I am happy to say I knows nothing about 'em, and if all's true as I've heard said over the ale-pot by the kitchen fire, the more people ask for leave, the less they are likely to get it. But may I make so bold, miss, as to ask the reason why such ladies as you wants to get in there? It would only break your hearts; and, what's more, they've

been having a horrid fever there, and that I know for certain, though they sent the poor little creturs off by night to be buried : some to one churchyard, and some to another, to stop people's tongues. It bean't no place, ladies, for you to go."

"When I tell you *why* we wish to enter there you will not say so," replied Mary. "The mill is worked by apprentice children, is it not?"

"Yes, miss, the more's the pity—for that's what makes the poor wretches slaves for life—for not many of 'em, by all accounts, lives till their time is up."

"Hear me then, Mrs. Prescott—among those miserable apprentices we hope and expect to find a dear child who belongs to us."

"Lack-a-day! what a story-book that would make!" exclaimed Mrs. Prescott. "How long is it since you lost him?"

"It is a long time," replied Mary, evading the question, "and it is a long story to tell how it happened. He is my own brother—and this lady who is come with me is our aunt."

"Are you quite sure, miss, that you shall find him there?"

"How can I say that, Mrs. Prescott, when you tell me so many of the children are dead?"

replied Mary. "But so much do I think I shall, that I will give five sovereigns to any one who will only put me in the way to get admittance to the mill."

Mrs. Prescott again shook her head. "There be a many and a many poor souls round about that would do almost anything honest for such a reward; but if anybody told you they could do as much, they would only deceive you. I don't believe there is anybody in the parish, not even the parson, could make 'em open their doors to let strangers in."

"Do you think that the person who has the power to open them would do it for a hundred pounds?" demanded Miss Brotherton.

"I can't take upon me to say, miss; it sounds like a fortune to me—but they are all rich at Deep Valley, as folks say, managers, overlookers, and all—so, maybe, they mayn't think so much of it."

"Mrs. Prescott, I would give five hundred pounds, rather than not look over the children at Deep Valley Mill."

The woman stared at her with a very natural mixture of curiosity and astonishment; but there was a friendly interest in her eye, also. "It's too late to-night, ma'am, to do anything," said she, "and if you'll be pleased to

say nothing to nobody till my husband comes home, I don't know but what he may be as likely to think upon what would be the best way to set about it as anybody; not that he ever meddles or makes with the people of the mill in any way, but he's a good schollard, and a quick-witted man too, as ever I know'd, though I say it as shouldn't "

This proposal was readily agreed to, and the interval till their host's return employed in a ramble of a mile or two along the road, where a recent shower had laid the dust, while every woodbine in the hedges which skirted it sent forth a delicious perfume. The outline of the hills around them, though hardly deserving Mrs. Prescott's epithet of mountainous, was bold and picturesque, and the foreground, with its hanging levels and rich copses, altogether formed a scene of considerable beauty.

" All this is very pretty, my good Tremlett," said Mary, offering her arm to her old friend to assist her ascent of a steep hill, " and I should enjoy it greatly did I not fancy that, could we look over yonder hill-tops, we should see a hateful roof, excluding the sweet breath of evening from the helpless creatures it encloses."

" God grant that you may snatch one of

them from it, my dear child," replied the old woman; "let that thought comfort you."

"Should I succeed!" cried Mary, "should I indeed carry home that little fellow to his poor mother and my pretty Edward, I should certainly feel something approaching to perfect happiness! But if I fail! how shall I bear to meet them?"

"Think not of it, dear! See how that last bit of sunshine comes full upon your face as you talk about it; that is a sign, my dear, that you will have your wish."

It *was* the last bit of sunshine, for the next moment the golden disc was hid behind a ridge of hills: yet they walked on for nearly a mile farther, and, when they returned to the King's Head, they found the good man of the house already at home, and his supper, as his wife assured them, very nearly finished. "He shall come to you in half a minute, ladies, if you'll please to be seated, while I bring in the candles;—I have told him all you said to me, and he don't seem so much put out about it, by much, as me; but he's uncommon 'cute, as you'll find when you comes to talk to him."

In about a quarter of an hour Mr. Prescott knocked at the parlour-door, and, being properly introduced to the ladies by his wife, was left

standing before them, while she retreated to pursue her various avocations.

"Your wife has told you, Mr. Prescott, our reason for coming here?" said Miss Brotherton, glad to escape the repetition of her fictitious tale.

"She has, ma'am," was the succinct reply.

"And do you think it possible for us to obtain admission to Deep Valley Mill, and to go over it in such a manner as to give us an opportunity of seeing all the children?"

"If I had heard that much, as to your purpose, ladies, and nothing more, I should have said no, you could no more get into Deep Valley factory than into the moon. But my missis added something to the back of it, as makes a difference." This was said with a look and accent which fully justified Mrs. Prescott's assurances of her good man's "cuteness."

"I think, Mr. Prescott, that she said no more than I am willing to make good," replied Mary. "I do not wish to expend money wantonly, but, if less will not serve, I am ready to give five hundred pounds to any person who could enable me to see all the children in Deep Valley Mill."

"It is a long sum, miss," replied the man thoughtfully, "and I can't but fancy that less

might serve. The people as is in authority there is bad people, I don't scruple to say it, and sooner than open their doors for pity towards any Christian soul, man, woman, or child, they would see 'em all in the bottomless pit. But 'tis just because they do all the wickedness we hears of, that I sees hope they may be bought to break their own laws: for if they does one thing for the love of gold, they may do another. 'Tis plain enough to see, to be sure, that they knows it is for their interest to keep all eyes off their cruel goings-on—and what's for their interest they won't easily give up. So it may be that squire Elgood Sharpton himself would turn away from five hundred pounds, rather than show off his poor miserable apprentices. But that mayn't hold good for his agent, and I believe in my heart that, if we could quietly get to offer Woodcomb, the manager, a hundred pounds, you would not have long to wait for a sight of the children."

"And how is this to be done, Mr. Prescott?" said Miss Brotherton: "If you can undertake to manage it, you may put what price you like on your services, I feel certain that you would not name a higher sum than I should be willing to pay."

"Why, as for me, miss, I must not be known to meddle or make in the matter. Squire

Sharpton would have my licence away before I could say Jack Robinson. Any advice I can give is at your service, and I may be able to put you up, perhaps, to doing the thing in the likeliest way ; but as to my going to the mill, it won't do. One reason is, that I never was there before, and it's like enough that, seeing a stranger, they'd set the dogs at me before I had time to say my errand. No !—that won't answer. The only man I can think of as would give us a chance is one Smith, the miller as serves 'em with oatmeal, and pretty stuff 'tis, as I've been told, which don't speak over-well for his honesty, you'll say, though 'tis likely the price is in proportion. Howsomever, whether he be good or bad, I don't know another as comes and goes to Deep Valley as he does, and that's what makes me fix upon him as a messenger."

" And when could I see this man ?" demanded Mary.

" Why, betimes to-morrow, miss, there's no doubt, if I goes and gives him notice."

" Then, do so, Mr. Prescott, and be assured your trouble shall not be forgotten."

" There is no fear of it, miss," replied the acute landlord with very honest sincerity, " and I'll go to the mill outright. But I think

—you'll be pleased to excuse me for speaking my mind—that you two ladies must settle between yourselves what you'd be willing to give Timothy Smith himself for the job—seeing that he's not one to work for nothing ;—and another thing I'd make so free as to mention is, that you'd do well to make him understand that you don't want to get inside their wicked den, but only to see the children, one and all of 'em—and then you know, miss, they may trim 'em and scour 'em up a little for shame's sake, afore they brings 'em out."

Miss Brotherton, after this conversation, felt as fully convinced as the good wife herself could desire of the value of the landlord's head, and determined to be guided by his advice. After a little further conversation between them, it was settled that she should write a note to Mr. Woodcomb, the manager, in readiness to give into the hands of Mr. Timothy Smith on the following morning, if she could prevail upon him to deliver it.

Mr. Prescott performed his part of the business ably, for the portly miller was waiting for the ladies in the parlour when they returned from their early walk.

Miss Brotherton possessed a sort of instinctive skill in reading the human countenance,

which rarely deceived her, and it took her not long to discover that the man she had now to deal with was one upon whom it would be folly to waste any arguments which did not affect his own interest. She, therefore, briefly stated the fact that it was of great importance to her to obtain sight of all the apprentices at Deep Valley Mill, having great reason to hope that she should find a young relative there, for whose release from all engagements she was willing to pay handsomely.

"It is not the custom, ma'am, to admit visitors at that factory. It have been found to hinder the work," replied the miller solemnly.

"So I understand, sir. But hearing that you are in the habit of visiting the mill on business, I have taken the liberty to send for you in order to say, that if you would undertake to deliver this note to Mr. Woodcomb, the manager, I would willingly give you five pounds for your trouble."

"That is hardly enough, ma'am, for the risk of offending so good a customer," replied the miller.

"Will double that sum induce you to do it for me?" said Mary.

"On what day do you wish it to reach Mr. Woodcomb's hands?" demanded Mr. Timothy

Smith, endeavouring to retain a doubtful expression of countenance.

“To-day, sir ; as early as possible.”

“Then, ma’am, I’ll be fair and open with you, and not go about to mince the matter, or deceive you in any way. If you will pay me down twenty pounds in gold, or Bank of England notes, I will consent to give up all the important business I had fixed to do this morning, and undertake, not only to give your letter to Mr. Woodcomb, but to use my influence with him—which is greater than you may guess for—to make him do what you wish, provided that you treat him with the liberality which a gentleman like him has a right to expect.”

Miss Brotherton drew forth her pocket-book.

“I will give you the twenty pounds you demand, Mr. Smith,” she said in a tone as business-like and decided as his own, “if you perform my errand successfully. I will give you this ten-pound note now, as payment for conveying the letter, and another of the same value when you return to me with the manager’s permission to see the children who are apprenticed at the mill.”

Mr. Timothy Smith looked at Miss Brotherton’s pocket-book, and he looked at her. His

glance at the first inspired a strong inclination to increase his demands ; but the miller had studied the human countenance as well as the lady, and when he looked at her he felt certain that, though young, rich, and very eager in pursuit of her object, she was not a fool, and that, if he pushed her to a more preposterous payment than he had already proposed, she would be likely enough to turn about and look for another agent. He therefore demurely replied,

“ It is all fair, ma'am ; I agree to the terms.”

And without wasting any further time, the man of the mill received the note, put on his hat, and departed.

Not all Mary's self-command, and, considering all things, she had a great deal, could enable her to await the return of her costly messenger with composure. All that she heard of this mysterious mill tended to prove that it was precisely such a place as Sir Matthew Dowling would be likely to fix upon as the abode of Michael. The more she meditated the more she became convinced that the boy was there, and she was hot and cold, pale and red, a dozen times in an hour.

She had kept a copy of her letter to the manager, that she might show it to Mr. Bell,

from whom she hoped to receive absolution for the innocent fraud she had practised. To read and re-read this letter, and to speculate with Mrs. Tremlett upon its probable and possible effects, occupied some portion of the tedious time: slowly dragging her steps up and down Mrs. Prescott's little garden, and occasionally sitting for a fidgety five minutes in a bower of scarlet-runners, employed the rest. But the morning seemed endless, and more than once she suspected that her watch stood still.

The important letter to Mr. Woodcomb was as follows:—

“Sir,—A wealthy and respectable family have recently had reason to believe that a dear child, long considered as lost, has been sent as an apprentice to Mr. Elgood Sharpton's factory at Deep Valley. Fully aware that the examination necessary to prove whether this hope be well founded must be attended with considerable trouble to you—inasmuch as the children must be brought out from their work for me to see, I beg to say that if, without giving me further trouble, you will permit this, I will pay the sum of one hundred pounds for the accommodation. Should it be

refused, I must have recourse to other means for the purpose of ascertaining what it is so important for me to know.

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"DORCAS TREMLETT."

It was not till five o'clock in the afternoon, by which time Mary was fully persuaded that her commission had failed, that Mr. Timothy Smith, in his white hat and well-powdered blue coat, was again seen approaching the King's Head. The heiress, who was sitting near the window, started up, and would certainly have stepped forward to meet him, had not Mrs. Tremlett whispered, "Sit down, Miss Mary, sit down, there's a darling, and look like a great lady as you did this morning; and that's what you are, and always should be."

Mary reseated herself, and, after a short interval, the miller knocked at the parlour-door, and was desired to enter. Miss Brother-ton pointed to a chair, and he rested himself. "The weather is warm, ladies," said he, drawing forth a cotton handkerchief, and wiping his head and face, "and I have not loitered in my errand, as you may see by the state I'm in; but my horse is getting in years, like his

master, and it's no easy work to drive him by such a road as that I have come by."

"Have you succeeded, sir?" said Miss Brotherton, looking as grand as Mrs. Tremlett could desire.

"I am happy to say, ma'am," he replied, with dignity, "that the second ten pounds is fairly won."

"I rejoice to hear it," cried Mary, brightly colouring; "and I shall have great pleasure in paying it. When, sir, may I see these children?" she added, pulling out her pocket-book as she spoke.

"Here, ma'am, is Mr. Woodcomb's reply to your note; and on the reading of that I look to hear you say that the ten pounds is mine."

Miss Brotherton took the dirty epistle offered her, and read:—

"Madam,—My employer is strict in his orders not to let the hands be interrupted, as they too often are in some mills, to gratify the idle curiosity of strangers. But, in consideration of your handsome proposal, and hoping that you won't scruple to follow it with a like sum in case of your finding and carrying away the child, which will be no more than just, seeing that if I part with a hand I must

get another in the place of it, on this condition I am willing that all the children on the premises shall be placed in the feeding-room for your inspection at twelve o'clock to-morrow.

"I am, Madam,

"Your humble servant,

"JAMES WOODCOMB."

The miller kept his eye fixed upon her as she read, and the result he looked for followed the perusal of the despatch he had brought. Miss Brotherton handed the letter to her friend, and then drew the promised bank-note from her pocket-book. The jolly miller rose and received it from her hands. "I thank you, madam," said he, folding it carefully, "and I beg to say, in return, that you would have been troubled to find another man who could have done your errand as well."

"I am quite satisfied, sir," she replied, "and will only ask in addition to what you have already done for me, that you would be obliging enough to tell me by what conveyance it will be best for us to get to the factory to-morrow? Mr. Woodcomb, as you probably know, has named twelve o'clock. I suppose the distance is too great for us to walk?"

“Quite impossible, ma’am—altogether out of the question. But I shall have no objection to hire out my chay-cart for the day, if so be you would think that suitable,” said the obliging miller.

“I have no doubt it would do perfectly well, provided you have a horse that can draw it—I should be sorry to lose time in going, and should not choose to be later than the hour appointed,” replied Mary.

“I’ll look to having a fitting horse, ma’am, and one as is used to the road, and that is what but few are. The road is no very good one in parts, that’s the truth, and I’m not over sure that there’s another man besides myself that would like to undertake the job: but I’ve no objection to driving you myself, ladies, provided you think it worth while to pay a tradesman for the loss of his time—of course I can’t charge my labour like a post-boy.”

“If you take means, sir, to get us to Deep Valley Mill by the hour appointed, and drive us back again safely to this house, we shall not dispute about the price. But remember, if you please, that the carriage, or cart, or whatever it is, must have accommodation for the child I hope to bring away with me.”

"I will take care of that, ma'am. I will put a little stool in on purpose ; and I think if I say two guineas, ma'am, for the job, which is no easy one, that you can't complain of the price ?"

"I certainly shall not complain of it," said Miss Brotherton.

Nine o'clock was then fixed as the hour of setting out, and Mr. Timothy Smith departed.

Mrs. Prescott's roast chicken and French beans were treated very differently from her previous breakfast and luncheon. Mary Brotherton was in higher spirits than she had enjoyed for many weeks—she felt confident of success, and for the first time in her life, perhaps, fully enjoyed the possession of the wealth which gave her such power of surmounting difficulties. The kind-hearted Mrs. Tremlett was at length as sanguine, and almost as happy as herself ; and very freely confessed, again and again, that her dear young lady knew ten times better how to manage things than she did, old as she was.

The evening was again spent in a long late ramble, and though they did not forget that over a certain towering height, pointed out

by Mrs. Prescott, lay the dismal spot called the Deep Valley, the exceeding happiness which was anticipated for one who dwelt there made them almost forget the misery of the rest.

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